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Contents

Editorial notes

Welcome to issue 46 of *Research Notes*, our quarterly publication reporting on matters relating to research, test development and validation within Cambridge ESOL.

The last issue to focus on young learners, *Research Notes* 28 (2007), was largely dedicated to various aspects of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* (also known as *Young Learners English* (*YLE*)) review and revision. The theme of *Research Notes* 46 is broader and addresses more recent issues in teaching and assessing young learners. It opens and closes with articles from external academics within the field of language testing.

Making sure that assessment is fit for purpose and for a particular context is important both for test providers and test users. In the opening article, Jessica Wu and Hui-Yun Lo investigate the use of YLE in the Taiwanese context and explore the relationship between YLE and local teaching practices. Their paper is followed by José Blanco and Debbie Howden's report on research carried out to investigate if YLE tests meet the expectations of teachers and parents, focusing on the motivation for learning English and the perceived value of external assessment of young learners. In the same vein, Andrew Blackhurst and Hugh Moss discuss a benchmarking project for young learners in Spanish bi-/tri-lingual schools, the purpose of which is assessing the learners' progress in English. They also explore the effect of such a programme on the uptake of external assessment. Szilvia Papp and Guy Nicholson provide an overview of child second language acquisition of vocabulary, after which they discuss Cambridge ESOL's YLE wordlists, which are used by item writers, and describe their recent update.

Suong Lam's paper takes us to a different type of research methodology, into the realm of action research. She describes a teaching approach she developed to overcome the discrepancy between non-native and native-speaker teachers in terms of young learners' levels of achievement in developing native-like pronunciation and interactive listening skills in English. Finally, Yoshinori Watanabe argues for the need for teaching language assessment literacy (or knowledge about assessment, the underlying skills and theory) to test takers, suggesting they could benefit considerably from it. Although Watanabe reports on the effect of his assessment literacy course on first year university students, the value of assessment literacy could also be seen in the context of teaching and assessing young learners, the major question being: 'How and when could we teach it to young(er) learners, in the light of their age, cognitive development and learning strategies?'

We finish the issue with a brief on a series of ALTE events, written by Martin Nuttall from the ALTE Secretariat.

The YLE tests and teaching in the Taiwanese context

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Introduction

In the past decade, the government of Taiwan has made raising the English language proficiency of its citizens a top priority in order to enhance Taiwan's competitiveness in the international community. Under this policy, in 2001 formal English instruction was advanced by two years from Grade 7 to Grade 5 (i.e. from the first year of junior high school to the fifth year of elementary school). In 2005, it was further advanced to Grade 3, and to Grade 1 in some major cities, such as Taipei City, New Taipei City, and Hsinchu City. Corresponding to the increasing number of children learning English, there has been a growing need for English assessment tools for young learners. This phenomenon has led to a debate on whether standardised tests should be used in assessing young learners' English proficiency. The key questions in the debate are the following: 'Is it beneficial to use standardised language tests for children?' and 'What is the relationship between testing and the classroom?'

Cambridge English: Young Learners (also known as *Young Learners English* (YLE) Tests), developed by University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (Cambridge ESOL), are now one of the most popular standardised English tests for children in Taiwan. According to its developer, the YLE is a comprehensive assessment tool which makes accurate and fair assessment and has a positive impact on a child's future language learning (Taylor & Saville 2002). However, while YLE is becoming popular in Taiwan, little, if any, research has been done to review its use in the Taiwanese context.

Given this gap, this study first investigates the relationship between the tests and local teaching practice by comparing the curriculum published by Taiwan's Ministry of Education (MoE) with the YLE handbooks and sample papers published by Cambridge ESOL. It then discusses collected stakeholders' opinions regarding the use of the YLE tests.

Comparison of the YLE test and English teaching at the elementary level

The MoE grades 1 to 9 curriculum

In Taiwan, education at the elementary and junior high school levels follows Grades 1 to 9 Curriculum Guidelines published by the MoE (MoE 2008). The curriculum describes two stages of learning in various areas: the first stage covers Grade 1 to Grade 6, which correspond to the elementary school level; the second stage covers Grade 7 to Grade 9, the junior high school level.

English teaching at the elementary school level follows the scheme outlined in the MoE Grades 1 to 9 curriculum. According to the curriculum, the objectives of English education are (1) to develop basic English communication

skills; (2) to develop students' interests and introduce effective ways of learning English; and (3) to enhance students' understanding of local and foreign cultures and customs. The curriculum also suggests that teachers and schools emphasise all four language skills, create interesting and interactive learning environments, and adopt authentic and interesting learning activities. To help teachers achieve these goals, the curriculum recommends lists of topics and genres, grammar and structures, communication functions, competence indicators, and vocabulary, which serve as guidelines for developing teaching and learning materials.

While the YLE tests are designed for learners between 7 and 12 years of age, the Grades 1 to 9 curriculum was developed to guide the teaching of English to students between the ages of 7 and 15. Table 1 shows how the tests and the curriculum are related in terms of the ages of the target population.

Table 1: Summary of information sources used in the study

Ages	YLE tests	MoE curriculum	
15	N/A	Grade 9	Second stage: Junior high school
14		Grade 8	
13		Grade 7	
12	Flyers Movers Starters	Grade 6	First stage: Elementary school
11		Grade 5	
10		Grade 4	
9		Grade 3	
8		Grade 2	
7		Grade 1	

Information sources

To study the fit between the YLE and English teaching in Taiwan, the YLE and the MoE curriculum were compared in terms of six aspects: topics, grammar and structures, communication functions, competence indicators, vocabulary, and tasks. In the comparison, we used information from various sources for triangulation, including the MoE Grades 1 to 9 curriculum, the YLE handbook (2003, 2006) and YLE sample papers published by Cambridge ESOL (2009), and a very popular series of English textbooks, *New Wow English* (2006–2011), published by a local textbook publisher. It is worth noting that although the curriculum describes two stages of learning, among the lists it provides, it does not specify what is to be covered at each stage, except for the competence indicator list. Table 2 summarises the information used in the comparison. The comparison was carried out by two in-house researchers at the Language Training and Testing Center (LTTC) independently, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

Table 2: A summary of information sources used in the study

	Teaching in Taiwan	YLE tests
Topics	MoE curriculum: Topic list	YLE handbook: Topic lists
Communication functions (Language use)	MoE curriculum: Communication functions	YLE handbook: Structure list – language use
Grammar and structures	MoE curriculum: Language structures	YLE handbook: Structure list – grammar and structures
	New Wow English Book 10	YLE sample papers
Competence indicators	MoE curriculum: Competence indicators	YLE sample papers
Vocabulary	MoE curriculum: Vocabulary list	YLE handbook: Vocabulary list (alphabetical and thematic)
Tasks	*New Wow English* Workbooks	YLE sample papers

Results of the comparison

Topics

The MoE curriculum lists 40 topics for both learning stages (elementary and junior high school), and the *YLE Handbook for Teachers* lists 19 topics across three test levels. Comparison of the two lists showed that, despite differences in wording, the MoE topic list covers all YLE topics except for one – materials. Given that the YLE is designed for primary school children aged 7 to 12, and the MoE curriculum for learners aged 7 to 15, it seems reasonable that the latter encompasses a wider range of subject matter and includes topics, such as environment & pollution, gender equality, human rights, and study habits or plans, that are more abstract and therefore require a higher level of cognitive ability.

Grammar and structures

All grammar structures tested in the YLE tests are covered in the MoE curriculum. Similar to the finding in the previous section, the MoE curriculum encompasses more structures than the YLE tests. These include, for example, reflective pronouns, past perfect tense, prepositional phrases as modifiers, present participles, and past participles, which may be too complex for the YLE's target test takers. Again, this is reasonable because of the broader scope (i.e. the curriculum is intended for learners at 7 to 15 years of age) of the MoE curriculum.

To further understand the syntactic complexity of the YLE sample papers, the Reading & Writing (R&W) paper at each level was analysed using *Wordsmith 5.0.* As shown in Table 3, among the three YLE test levels, Starters has the lowest mean sentence length (7.17 words), and Flyers the highest (11.06 words). This indicates that the Reading & Writing paper in Flyers is more complex in terms of sentence structures than that in Movers and Starters. This corresponds well to the predetermined difficulty levels of the tests.

Table 3: Syntactic complexity – YLE R&W sample papers

	Starters	Movers	Flyers
Average sentence length (words)	8.26	11.06	7.17

The reading texts in the Reading & Writing sample paper of Flyers and in *New Wow English* Book 10 were then compared in order to understand the extent to which the YLE tests and the teaching materials in Taiwan differ in terms of syntactic complexity. Flyers and *New Wow English* Book 10 were chosen for the comparison because the former is the highest level test in the YLE and the latter is the highest level material in the textbook series. While Flyers is designed for test takers aged 7 to 12, the textbook is used by 12-year-old sixth graders. In order to compare like with like, we compared textbook texts, all of which are short texts, with the short texts occurring in the Flyers Reading & Writing paper in Parts 4 to 7. Flyers Part 1 to Part 3 tasks were excluded from this analysis because they are predominantly based on sentence-level reading and require reading comprehension of mostly isolated sentences. As shown in Table 4, the average sentence length of the texts in the textbook ranged from 5.75 to 9.38 words, and in Flyers from 4.94 to 17.22 words. Therefore, with regard to text-based tasks, texts in Flyers have longer sentences than texts in the textbook. These results suggest that sixth graders who learn English with the textbook series may find the texts in the Reading & Writing paper at the Flyers level to have more complex sentence structures.

Communicative functions/language use

The MoE curriculum lists 45 communication functions for both learning stages, and YLE tests cover 61 across the three test levels. This information on functions in YLE tests is drawn from the 2003 YLE handbook because the revised YLE handbook published in 2006 does not provide an independent list of language use. Before the comparison, the degree of discrepancy between the two versions of the YLE test specifications was first examined. The results showed that despite some differences in input and expected responses, the main skill focuses in the tests remained unchanged.

While the YLE lists more communicative functions, many of them are similar to one another. For example, asking questions for information, asking about the name of someone or something, asking questions about the number of people, animals, and objects, and making and responding to requests for information about objects are all related to asking and giving information. The comparison results showed that all of the YLE communication functions are covered in the MoE curriculum; asking about the time, specifying dates, and talking about dates and time in the YLE, for example, are similar to asking about the time, the day, and the date in the MoE curriculum. In addition, asking for directions and asking how to spell a word in the YLE can be found in the MoE curriculum with minor variations: asking and giving directions and asking how words are spelled. Similar to the

Table 4: Average sentence length of reading passages in Flyers R&W paper and *New Wow English* Book 10

| | Flyers Reading & Writing | | | | | | | New Wow English Book 10 | | | | |
	Part 1	Part 2	Part 3	Part 4	Part 5	Part 6	Part 7	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Holiday
Words	148	79	79	159	229	154	73	205	181	166	112	75
Average sentence length (words)	8.22	11.29	4.94	13.50	10.59	17.22	10.43	5.75	7.12	8.35	7.67	9.38

findings with regard to topics and grammar and structures, the results also showed that functions in the MoE curriculum that may involve higher level cognitive development and more difficult vocabulary are not listed in the YLE. These include, for example, expressing concern, making appointments, making apologies, and extending, accepting, and declining invitations.

Competence indicators

The MoE curriculum provides competence indicators for each of the four language skills. These indicators state the abilities that students should attain at each learning stage (e.g. Listening: can comprehend simple daily exchanges; Speaking: can ask simple questions, provide answers and describe events using simple English; Reading: can identify the vocabulary items learned in class; Writing: can write simple sentences following the required format). A comparison between the competence indicators and the main skill focus of the YLE tests showed that all competence indicators are either directly or indirectly assessed in the YLE tests, except for two listed under Listening, two under Speaking, and one under Reading:

Listening:

• Can comprehend the main ideas of the songs and chants they hear

• Can comprehend the main ideas of the stories and playlets written for children.

Speaking:

• Can sing songs and chant chorally or individually

• Can take part in simple role-play performances.

Reading:

• Can read aloud the dialogues and stories in textbooks.

The exclusion of these indicators does not seem unreasonable, given that songs, chants, and playlets are text types more appropriate for teaching and learning purposes since it is difficult to operationalise them in a test.

Vocabulary

The MoE curriculum provides a wordlist of 1,201 basic words that are used for both the elementary and junior learning stages, and the YLE handbook provides a combined wordlist containing a total of 1,150 words that are used across the three test levels. Before the comparison, the names of people, cities, and countries were first removed from each list in order to obtain more reliable results. After the removal of the names, there were 1,198 words in the MoE wordlist, and 1,112 in the YLE wordlist. As can be seen in Table 5, of the 1,198 words in the MoE wordlist, 354 were at the Starters level, 209 at Movers, and 250 at Flyers. In total, the MoE wordlist shared 813 words with the YLE wordlist, a 73.11% coverage.

Table 5: Words common to both the MoE and YLE wordlists

| | YLE wordlist (1,112 words) | | | | |
	Starters	Movers	Flyers	Starters to Flyers	Off list
MoE wordlist (1,198 words)	354	209	250	813	385

Words that are not common to the two wordlists were then examined in order to understand how the two wordlists differ from each other. Analyses of these words showed that many of the differences stem from the varieties of English employed, cultural differences, and the different degrees of abstractness and cognitive development.

Varieties of English

While American English is used at all levels of English education in Taiwan, British English predominates in the YLE tests. As a result, words such as *motorbike, trousers, sweet(s), flat, rubber, lorry, supper,* and *chips* are found only in the YLE word list; and their counterparts in American English— *motorcycle, pants, candy, apartment, eraser, truck, dinner,* and *French fries* are found only in the MoE wordlist.

Cultural differences

Some words appear only in the MoE wordlist because they are unique to Taiwan and the Taiwanese culture. These include, for example, *dumpling* and *noodle,* which are popular foods in Taiwan; *dragon* and *lantern,* words that are related to two important Chinese festivals – Dragon Boat Festival and Lantern Festival; and *typhoon,* a weather phenomenon often seen in Taiwan during the summer season. In addition, the MoE wordlist contains *dodge ball,* a sport very popular among elementary school students in Taiwan, whereas the YLE wordlist includes *hockey,* a sport that many English people enjoy playing, and *sledge,* which is common in the UK and other countries which receive snowfall.

Different degrees of abstractness and cognitive development

As mentioned before, the MoE curriculum and the YLE tests are designed for different groups of learners. The MoE curriculum is intended for learners between 7 and 15 years of age while the YLE tests are suitable for learners up to 12 years old. Therefore, the MoE wordlist contains words that are more abstract, such as *serious, successful, proud, modern,* and *knowledge.* Similarly, the list includes words related to measurements such as *centimetre, gram, kilogram,* and *pound,* which may require higher cognitive development.

Tasks

In this part, the listening tasks, reading and writing tasks in the YLE tests and those in the workbooks of the *New Wow English* series were examined in order to understand to what extent YLE tests reflect classroom practice. Speaking tasks

Table 6: Mean scores of satisfaction rating

Questions		Starters	Movers	Flyers	Average
1	Overall satisfaction with the YLE	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5
2	Reading & Writing test	4.4	4.4	4.4	4.4
3	Listening test	4.4	4.4	4.5	4.4
4	Speaking test	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.5
5	How well do the tests measure your students' English ability?	4.4	4.4	4.4	4.4
6	The administration procedures	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.4

Table 7: YLE and teaching

Questions		Starters	Movers	Flyers	Average
7	How well do the tests meet learning goals?	4.2	4.2	4.3	4.2
8	How well do the tests reflect the curriculum?	3.9	4.0	4.0	4.0
9	How well do the tests reflect textbooks used?	3.7	3.8	3.9	3.8
10	How well do the tests reflect classroom practice?	3.8	3.9	4.0	3.9
14	How well can your normal teaching programmes prepare your students for the tests?	4.3	4.2	4.2	4.2

were not included in the comparison because there were no speaking tasks in the workbooks. Among nine listening tasks in the YLE tests, five had similar counterparts in the workbooks with minor variations. For example, Part 3 of the Flyers Listening paper asks test takers to listen to a conversation and, based on what they hear, match a list of words with a set of pictures by writing the letter of the correct picture in a box. A similar task was found in Book 3 of the workbook series, in which learners match four short descriptions they hear with a picture of four children doing different activities.

Similar results were obtained regarding reading and writing tasks: eight out of 14 tasks in the YLE tests were covered in the workbooks. For example, a reading task in Book 5 of the workbook series asks learners to look at five pictures, each with a correct or wrong statement about the picture. Learners are to decide whether the statements are right or wrong based on what they see in the picture and indicate their choice by circling true (T) or (F) false for each statement. This task is similar to Part 2 of the Starters Reading & Writing paper, in which test takers look at a picture and five statements about the picture, decide whether the statements are right or wrong based on what they see in the picture, and then indicate their choice by writing 'yes' or 'no'. The results suggested that learners who learn English using the textbook series are likely to find some of the tasks in the YLE Listening and Reading & Writing papers familiar.

The stakeholders' survey

In order to understand the stakeholders' view of the YLE tests, language schools that use the tests were invited to respond to a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 16 questions relating to the following four aspects: test users' satisfaction with the YLE tests; the degree to which the YLE tests reflect their English teaching; the degree to which the YLE tests are suitable for their learners; and the impact of the YLE tests. For each question, respondents

were asked to provide a rating ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very well). Twenty-nine out of 35 institutions responded, and the results are summarised in the following sections.

Satisfaction with the YLE

As shown in Table 6, there is a high level of satisfaction with the YLE tests in terms of the test content (Q1 to Q4) and the administration procedures (Q6) across the three test levels. In addition, teachers are also satisfied with the validity of the YLE (Q5).

How well does the YLE reflect teaching?

As can be seen in Table 7, the respondents generally agreed that the YLE tests reflect their teaching practices. They gave high ratings when asked how well the tests meet learning goals (Q7), and how well their normal teaching programmes prepare their students for the tests (Q14). However, slightly less agreement was observed among the teachers as to whether the tests match the textbooks they used (Q9) and their classroom practice (Q10). A possible explanation for the comparatively lower ratings may be that the teachers were using different teaching materials which correspond to the YLE tests to varying degrees.

How suitable is the YLE for learners in Taiwan?

As shown in Table 8, the respondents agreed that the content and format of the YLE tests were suitable for their students (Q12), but they seemed to be slightly less sure about the extent to which the YLE tests were suitable for learners in terms of their cultural backgrounds (Q11). The respondents' reservations with regard to the latter question corresponded well to the finding in the comparison study that the cultural differences between Taiwan and the UK caused discrepancy in the wordlists. In addition, a reasonable gap between an international test and local teaching practices is normal because it is highly unlikely to make a language test 'culturally neutral', since language use and culture cannot be separated from each other.

Table 8: YLE and learners in Taiwan

Questions		Starters	Movers	Flyers	Average
11	How suitable are the content and format of the YLE test materials for young learners in Taiwan in light of their culture background?	3.8	3.8	3.9	3.8
12	How suitable are the content and format of the YLE tests for your students in light of their ages?	4.2	4.4	4.5	4.4

Table 9: The impact of the YLE

Questions		Starters	Movers	Flyers	Average
13	How positive is the washback on the classroom?	4.3	4.3	4.4	4.3
15	How positive do your students feel about their experience of taking the YLE tests?	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.4
16	How positive do the parents of your students feel about the YLE?	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.3

The impact of the YLE

Table 9 shows that the respondents agreed that the YLE has a positive impact on their teaching, their students, and the students' parents. This finding corresponded well with Cambridge ESOL's expectation that the YLE and all other tests they have developed should 'encourage positive learning experiences, and to seek to achieve a positive impact wherever possible' (Cambridge ESOL 2006: 2).

Conclusion

This paper has reported the findings of a comparison study of the YLE tests and English teaching at the elementary level in Taiwan, and the results of a stakeholders' survey. The comparison study, which was mainly based on the Taiwan MoE Grades 1 to 9 curriculum and the YLE tests handbooks and Sample Papers, showed that although differences exist, the YLE tests correspond to English teaching at the elementary level in Taiwan to a moderate or high degree in terms of topics, vocabulary, grammar and structures, communication functions, and tasks. In addition, the stakeholders' survey showed that teachers were generally satisfied with the YLE tests. Teachers also agreed that the YLE tests match teaching in Taiwan, are suitable for young learners in Taiwan, and have positive impacts on students, the classroom, and parents. The findings of the comparison study and the stakeholders' survey together suggest that the YLE tests can be considered an appropriate tool for assessing the English proficiency of young learners in Taiwan.

However, some limitations of this study must be noted. First of all, the comparison study was carried out by two in-house researchers at the LTTC; furthermore, due to

the scale of this study, we included only one textbook series among the many choices of teaching materials on the market in the comparison; finally, the stakeholders' survey was primarily concerned with teachers' perceptions. Given these limitations, it is suggested that, for future comparison studies, external experts such as curriculum developers and teachers be involved, and different textbook series be included to allow more comprehensive and thorough examination and comparison. With regard to the stakeholders' survey, it is suggested that test takers' and parents' views of the YLE tests be considered in order to gain a more complete picture of the stakeholders' attitudes towards the YLE tests.

Note

Due to the article word limit, detailed result tables of the comparison are not included in this paper. The tables can be provided upon request.

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Seeking stakeholders' views on Cambridge English exams: School sector

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Introduction

As part of Cambridge ESOL's ongoing commitment to improving the quality of its tests, we regularly seek key stakeholders' views in order to ensure that the tests we produce are fit for purpose. In late 2010, a research project was initiated to look at whether Cambridge ESOL's current provision of tests for younger learners (*Cambridge English: Young Learners*, aka *Young Learners English* or *YLE*) met the expectations of teachers and parents – two key stakeholders in this area. Two areas discussed were motivation for learning English and perceptions of external certification. Another research project was carried out in Argentina amongst teachers, students and parents, focusing on younger learners taking *Cambridge English: First* (aka *First Certificate in English* or *FCE*). These stakeholders were also asked about the motivation for learning English and the value of external assessment. The present article will discuss the methodology used in carrying out this research and the principal findings of the research in respect of the motivation for learning English and the perceived value of external assessment.

Stakeholders' views of YLE

FreshMinds Research, an external agency based in the UK, was selected to carry out research with teachers and parents of children aged between 4–12 years who were learning English.

During January and February 2011, 39 interviews were conducted with teachers based in Greece, India, Italy, Spain, Mexico, Turkey and Hong Kong. The participants included parents and teachers of children that prepare for English language examinations provided by Cambridge ESOL and other examination boards. In-depth interviews with 12 parents in Greece, Italy and India and 90 interviews with parents in Spain, Mexico and Hong Kong were also conducted.

Reasons for learning English

Parents were asked the reasons behind their children learning English; the findings are presented in Figure 1.

Most parents think that English is a valuable skill to have and they generally hope that their children will eventually become proficient in all four skills. Parents also felt that being proficient in English would improve the general employability of their children, in addition to being considered a valuable skill in itself. Figure 1 illustrates the different reasons parents gave for their children learning English. Findings from the research would suggest that parents place value

Figure 1: Why children are encouraged to learn English
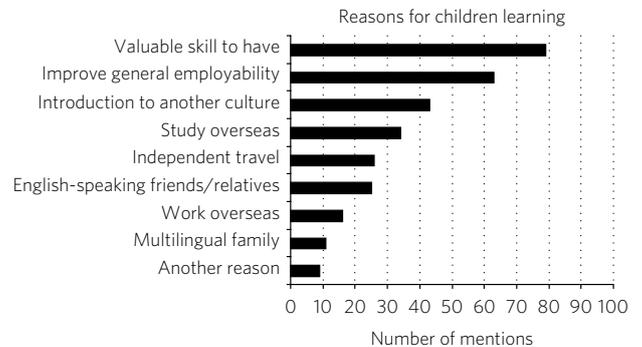
on their children being proficient in all four skills in English. They are keen to ensure that their children are given the best employability options in later life, and for some it was important that their children be in a position to study overseas should they so wish.

## Teachers believe that formal assessment is considered important

When asked for their views on formal assessment (standardised external or internal assessments), over 90% of teachers thought that this was either 'very important' or 'quite important'. When questioned as to how the results should be represented, there was more variation in the replies. Over three-quarters of the teachers believed that there should be some kind of personal feedback for the students in order for the teachers and students to use this information formatively. However, there was some national variation as to the amount of personal feedback that should be given: teachers in India placed much importance on this, while teachers in Spain, Turkey and Italy did not consider this to be so important. Teachers also felt that the results should be represented by a grade. However, there was some concern that a number or letter grade could cause anxiety for some of the children. The teachers interviewed also expressed the opinion that parents would expect a grade which was internationally recognised. No teacher felt that a simple pass/fail result was sufficient.

Teachers believe that external certification is popular with parents

Teachers were interviewed on what they believed parents' perceptions of the value of external certification was, as opposed to students being assessed only internally by their teacher. The teachers' belief was that at least half of all parents welcome and see value in external certification (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Teachers' belief on parents' perception of the value of external certification

What proportion of parents do you think would see value in your pupils' English skills being certified by an organisation other than your school?

- A small proportion
- Around half
- Most of them
- All of them
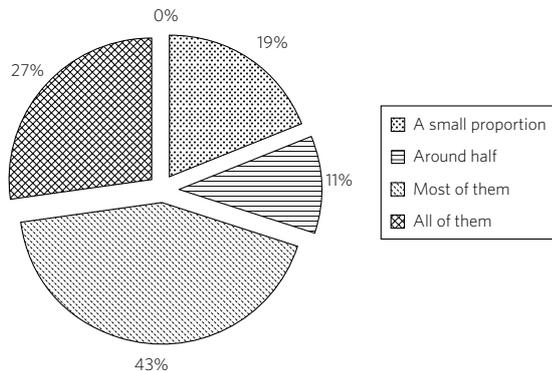
There were two main reasons given for the value of external certification: parents saw the value of having an internationally recognised certificate, especially when recommended by teachers who they trust on matters of education such as external certification, e.g.:

'Parents are not really aware of them at all, they have to be made aware by the school authorities. Most of the parents are not well aware of the importance of English language tests' (Teacher, India).

'In the modern world, having a certificate that proves you are proficient in another language is always very helpful. If the student gets it early and it doesn't expire, like the KET, it is very valuable, and if well informed then the school community can appreciate its value' (Teacher, Turkey).

Formal assessment and certification are important to parents

Parents were also asked about their views on formal assessment and certification. Around half of the parents included in the research said that formal assessment was very important, and a further third said that it was quite important, which agrees with teachers' beliefs on the parents' perception (discussed above). However, some parents did express concern that formal assessment could cause stress for younger students. Some parents were of the opinion that the opportunity to take examinations through the medium of the computer would be motivating for their children: *'Children love computers, it would take the stress of the assessment away and they would be more focused'* … (Parent, Greece). Parents also place much value on continuous class-based assessment and individual formative feedback which could assist their children in learning and improving their English.

When discussing formal certification there was a fairly equal split as to whether this should be internal or external. Though some parents felt that external assessment would be more impartial and would help their children with their long-term academic and career goals, other parents felt that a school certificate would be sufficient. Only a very few parents felt that an informal assessment was sufficient.

Parents' responses seemed to confirm teachers' views about the most valuable form of exam feedback, with constructive feedback and graded marking being the most popular. Again, there was some national variation in the responses given, with parents in India less likely to consider constructive feedback as the most important, contradicting the view expressed by teachers. In Greece and Italy however, constructive feedback was considered to be more important than a graded mark.

Stakeholder views of *Cambridge English: First* – The case of schools in Argentina

TNS, an external agency, was selected to take forward this market research project in Argentina.

The qualitative stage of this research involved focus groups and in-depth interviews. The four focus groups were held with a total of 32 students and parents of students aged between 15–17 years, planning to take *Cambridge English: First.*

The focus groups were split in the following way:

Group 1 – 8 female students

Group 2 – 8 male students

Group 3 – 8 mothers

Group 4 – 8 fathers

To participate in the focus group, each parent and student needed to be within the C1/C2 socio-economic level (skilled workers and lower middle class) and live in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area. They also needed to be involved in the decision-making process in selecting *Cambridge English: First.*

In-depth interviews were carried out with three teachers working for private mainstream schools and three teachers working for private English language institutes.

English is seen as an essential skill to have

Both parents and teachers value English and think that it is a key skill to have, e.g. *'I am concerned about the fact that they should have tools to face the future, the world ahead'* (Parent, Argentina). The ability to speak English is highly valued with practical use in real life; it is seen as indispensable, a necessity and a basic skill to have.

The issue facing teachers is how to best motivate students to continue learning. Once students and parents perceive that they already 'speak English' the value and predisposition to continue learning and deepening the knowledge of the language decreases: *'Once they consider they "speak English" it is hard to make them want to continue going into more depth'* (Teacher, Argentina).

Teachers believe that changes in the perception of English language have had an impact on the classroom and they face a daily pedagogical challenge as they deal with what they have termed 'corruption', i.e. the broad informal contact with the language is seen as being potentially detrimental to

the learning process. There was also some concern over the dominance of the communicative role of language which sets the standard for the classroom over and above improving vocabulary, grammar and syntax.

However, there was significant disagreement between parents and teachers when questioned about the level of support provided outside the classroom. Parents place strong demands on teachers and schools; they value studying and want their children to be challenged and to work hard: '*I want them to get a lot of homework and that they are asked a lot*' (Parent, Argentina). Teachers, however, perceive that the family's commitment is often more rhetorical than concrete: '*Increasingly I see less commitment from the family, at home; we cannot count on that any more*' (Teacher, Argentina). Teachers also mentioned the difficult situation that they are often placed in by parents: '*Parents demand but then complain if there is a lot of homework*' (Teacher, Argentina).

External qualifications are valued by schools, parents, students and teachers

Different stakeholders all value external qualifications, though the value is slightly different for each of them. For schools, using external certification is seen as a way of differentiating the school from other schools in the area. Teachers see external qualifications as a way of validating the work that they are doing in the classroom. Parents see it as a guarantee for the future of their children, whilst the children themselves see external qualifications as a must-have: their friends have external qualifications so they need one too.

Teachers see external qualifications as having multiple roles in addition to validating the work carried out in the classroom. They provide motivation for the students passing an exam is seen as a goal that drives students: '*It is useful in many ways. It is a driver because you can set a clear objective, children are motivated, they want to pass it and so do we; we don't want to have students who fail because that relates partly*

to our work too' (Teacher, Argentina). The qualifications also provide prestige; the personal prestige of the teachers is also at stake with failure within the class seen as a black mark: '*You think of the student, of not exposing him/her, but also as an institution, because you don't want to have a high percentage of failures*' (Teacher, Argentina).

Students recognise and value getting a qualification, mainly due to its future potential value: from an academic perspective it can help them enter foreign universities; in the workplace it is seen as a distinguishing feature on their CVs, which set them apart from other candidates. The social value is also mentioned in that it helps them when they travel and helps them interact with people from other countries.

Taking exams also has implications for the here and now, with students saying that it is a logical point to reach after a long period of study. In addition, sitting the exam establishes the idea of belonging to a group, an experience that is shared with friends: '*It's just everyone in my group is going to take it, so it's kind of obvious*' (Student, Argentina).

For parents, an external qualification is seen as providing added value over and above the High School diploma. They feel that they are providing their children with additional help to go out into the world: '*It is one more tool, and if I can provide it, I don't hesitate*' (Parent, Argentina). It is seen as an investment for the future, providing in some cases the opportunities for their children that they may not have had themselves.

Conclusion

Seeking views from key stakeholders in the school sector, such as teachers, parents and students, is ongoing. Cambridge ESOL acts upon the findings from the research to ensure that its assessments are fit for purpose. Findings are also used to ensure that adequate and effective support is provided to everyone involved in taking Cambridge English examinations.

Benchmarking young learners in Spain

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Introduction

The ability to communicate in English is coming to be regarded as a core skill, which parents – and governments – are keen that children should acquire. Multilingual education programmes are a reflection of this, as educators respond by increasing the role of English in the classroom. In this paper, which follows on from a previous article in *Research Notes* (Blanco and Nicholson 2010), we look at Cambridge ESOL's recent involvement in benchmarking programmes associated with such multilingual programmes

in Spain, one in the context of bilingual education promoted by the *Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid* (CAM), and two in the trilingual (Basque, Castilian and English) context of the *Euskal Autonomia Erkidegoa*.

Spain is one of Europe's most decentralised countries, characterised as an *Estado de las Autonomías* ('State of Autonomies') in which varying degrees of self-government have been devolved to the 17 autonomous communities. The Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (*Euskal Autonomia Erkidegoa*) was among the first of the autonomous communities to be recognised in December

1979, with the Autonomous Community of Madrid (*Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid)*, created four years later, being the youngest of the 17. Responsibility for education policy primarily rests with the communities, rather than the national government. Parents can choose for their children to attend either secular schools run by the communities or schools linked to the Catholic Church, and Cambridge ESOL has been involved in projects involving both sectors.

The Bilingual Programme in the secondary schools of Madrid

The CAM's bilingual project began in the academic year 2004–2005. The long-term objective is to increase English language skills among the city's future workforce, as this is seen to be important to securing foreign investment into the city and indeed the country. The schools involved are wholly state-run and secular. In 2004–2005, 26 primary schools were selected and their teachers were given training, so that English could become a working language in the schools. The project has subsequently expanded greatly, so that by 2010–2011 there were 242 bilingual state schools in the Community of Madrid, of which 167 were primary schools. Spanish Language, Maths and English were declared core subjects, with Physical Education, Art and Science also being taught in English so that a minimum of 30% of teaching time would employ the language. These bilingual schools are intended to help their pupils, throughout their primary education, develop an adequate command of both spoken and written English and Spanish, with the intention that the pupils should not only be able to recognise the different possible expressive styles in both languages, but should also acquire enough communicative competence in English to be able to interact naturally in everyday situations. The bilingual initiative has enjoyed a high political profile in the city.

The goal of the programme is that 6th year primary school children (age 11–12 years) should achieve B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). In order to establish the extent to which that was a realistic target for the children, Cambridge ESOL was commissioned to develop a benchmarking test for the Comunidad de Madrid, which would indicate their readiness to sit the *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* (*PET for Schools*) in May 2010 and, subsequently, May 2011.

A bespoke 45-item benchmarking test was designed by Cambridge ESOL, containing items from the Cambridge ESOL item bank, all testing Reading and Use of English. Items include both 3- and 4-option multiple-choice questions, including cloze and extended reading types. The tasks have been drawn from all three levels of the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams together with an anchor section of items drawn from *Cambridge English: Key* (*Key English Test – KET*) and *Cambridge English: Preliminary* (*Preliminary English Test - PET*), whose previously established difficulty values enabled the whole test to be placed on the Cambridge Common Scale of difficulty, which is closely aligned to the notional levels of the CEFR. Items were chosen to cover a range of CEFR levels from pre-A1 to B1. The theoretical

basis for the design of the test was that it should correspond closely to an active and communicative approach to learning English. The task types and format, the test content and the timing of the test were designed to reflect the fact that the candidates were 6th year primary school students. All items had an international focus and relevance to a youthful test population, and no references to culture-specific matters were made.

The test was administered locally in the schools by their staff, who ensured that the test was taken under appropriate secure conditions. The first administration of the test was in December 2009, and involved 12 schools, each of which provided 25 entrants except one, which provided 17 entrants. Marking was undertaken in Cambridge, after which the analysis of the candidates' performance was undertaken by Cambridge ESOL's Research and Validation Group. The results of the benchmarking exercise were analysed by members of the Cambridge ESOL Validation team who determined each student's overall CEFR levels. The raw scores of the Reading and Use of English, Writing, Listening and Speaking components were equally weighted to provide a mean score and these were converted into Z scores, allowing a meaningful comparison of performance across the four skills.

The results indicated that some 33% of children across the autonomous community were already at B1, or performing strongly at A2, and therefore might reasonably be expected to pass *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* in May 2010, but that the *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* (*Key English Test for Schools – KET for Schools*) at A2 level would be a more appropriate target for the majority of the children. Cambridge ESOL examinations were adopted for 6th year pupils in 2010, many of whom were entered for *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools*.

This year, the benchmarking test was administered in February to 6th year primary pupils in 92 schools. The results indicated that almost 49% of the pupils were at B1 or performing strongly at A2 and might reasonably be expected to pass *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools*. In fact, 75% of candidates sat either *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* or *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools*, with the proportion sitting the B1 level exam rising from just 9% in 2010 to 29% in 2011. Passing either of these lower level 'for Schools' examinations entitles the pupils to a place in a bilingual secondary school at the start of the next school year. Therefore, the impact of exam results is significant for both students and their parents.

Besides the benchmarking test for 6th year students, a further cohort of 4th year primary pupils completed a separate benchmarking test in order to have their Listening and Speaking skills assessed. The items were selected from the *Cambridge English: Flyers*, set at CEFR Level A2, with tasks specifically designed to motivate and to ensure that the testing experience has a positive impact on students' future language learning. In the case of the two-skill Young Learner benchmarking exercise, the data produced after analysis enabled the local Board of Education to consider the results, again with a view to reviewing the success of the bilingual programme.

The benchmarking project carried out in the Comunidad de Madrid state schools played a crucial role in enabling the success of the bilingual programme to be measured and monitored. Due to its position as a world leader in assessment, Cambridge ESOL was uniquely placed to develop a tailored solution in terms of the benchmarking test and also to carry out the necessary analysis of results. In addition, candidates were able to undertake a high-quality examination of an appropriate level for them, aligned to the CEFR.

Promoting multilingualism: The case of *Kristau Eskola*

The Basque Country is one of six autonomous regions in Spain which have two official languages. Consequently the context here is the promotion of trilingualism. Kristau Eskola is the federation of schools in the Basque Country linked to the Catholic Church. Cambridge ESOL has been working with the federation for many years, and they were the first such body to sign an agreement to offer external assessment in their schools. In 2006, Kristau Eskola joined Cambridge ESOL's centre network, becoming an internal centre (ES299) offering external assessment to students studying at any of their 155 schools across the Basque Country. Within the Basque Country, the Catholic schools are at the forefront of education and have set themselves ambitious targets in the learning of English and other languages, with a trilingual project which involves teaching in the Spanish, Basque and English languages, and use of a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach to teaching and learning, in which subjects are taught and studied through the medium of a non-native language. Within the trilingual project, the degree to which subjects may be taught in any of these three languages is variable, as long as at least 20% of teaching time is carried out in each one. It would, therefore, be perfectly feasible for a child to be taught, for example, 60% in Basque, 20% in Spanish and 20% in English.

Kristau Eskola has entered into a collaborative agreement with Cambridge ESOL to provide a benchmarking exercise in their schools. This is an annual project involving the assessment of students at primary and secondary level, and participation is open to all schools within the federation on a voluntary basis. The initial phase of the study took place in 2008, when the exam results for YLE, KET and PET from 34 participating schools in the Basque Country were analysed by Cambridge ESOL and compared to data for the same versions of the exams taken by other candidates in the rest of Spain. The intention was to check their alignment with the forthcoming requirements of the Basque Trilingual Programme and to review teaching methods to consider if they needed to be improved. To assist in this process, a questionnaire was designed and sent to participating schools in the Basque Country, and the data returned was considered alongside test results to produce a set of recommendations regarding improvements required in each of the four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) in terms of teaching methods (including CLIL), degree of exposure to English, test

preparation, and exploitation of teaching materials, among other aspects.

Following on from the results of the report produced in the summer of 2008, in subsequent years (2009, 2010 and 2011) Cambridge ESOL has provided a continuing benchmarking service to track progress towards the realisation of the trilingual project's aims. Benchmarking is carried out through the administration of a bespoke test, the English Benchmarking Test, created by Cambridge ESOL specifically for the needs of the student body, covering Reading and Use of English, Writing, Listening and Speaking. The tests have been designed to include items targeted at the interests and experiences of younger people, and contain a range of task and response types including matching activities, multiple-choice cloze, sentence completion and an interactive speaking activity, in order to ensure that the test reflects the use of language in real life. The majority of items in the tests are of the types that appear in *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* examinations, which are familiar to both teachers and students.

Items are drawn from the Cambridge ESOL item bank, and have been fully pretested on an extensive number of candidates around the world in order to establish reliable item difficulties and to ensure that test results are stable and consistent. The tasks in the tests range across a number of levels to enable reporting of candidate performance from CEFR Level A1 or below to B1 or above.

The purpose of the benchmarking project undertaken by Cambridge ESOL for Kristau Eskola is to evaluate the levels of the students and monitor their progress in terms of the Basque Trilingual Programme, which has set the following objectives: children at the end of primary (11 to 12 years old) are expected to attain a CEFR level of at least A2 level in English (equivalent to *Cambridge English: Flyers* or *Cambridge English: Key for Schools*); children at the end of obligatory secondary education (16 years of age) are expected to attain a CEFR level of at least B1 level (*Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools*).

The first administration of the benchmarking test was in May 2009. It was administered locally by ES299, in conjunction with Kristau Eskola staff, who ensured that the test was taken under strict supervision in order to protect the security of the test materials. Twenty-two schools took part and these were identified by the central administration of Kristau Eskola. Marking was undertaken by Cambridge ESOL with the exception of the Speaking test, which was marked locally by Cambridge ESOL approved Speaking examiners. The results of the benchmarking exercise were analysed by members of the Cambridge ESOL Validation team to establish each candidate's CEFR levels. The raw scores of the Reading and Use of English, Writing, Listening and Speaking components were equally weighted to provide a mean score and these were converted into Z scores, allowing a meaningful comparison of performance across the four skills.

The results provided a clear indication of the language proficiency of individual candidates, and based on a random sample of students in a particular school year, it was possible to make inferences as to the likely language proficiency of all students within that school year. By breaking down the

results by skill, it was possible for schools to see which skill areas students were performing well in, and which areas they needed to focus on in the future. This allowed individual schools to set achievable targets and develop English language programmes accordingly.

The results of the first 2009 study were very encouraging and showed that, overall, students' levels are moving towards the expected targets. The A2 level had been reached or exceeded by 56% of the primary school students. Similarly, 60% of the secondary school students had already reached their target level of B1. The benchmarking exercise was repeated in subsequent years, and in May 2010 20 schools took part (11 of which had also taken part in 2009), and in 2011, 27 schools participated. The 2011 results suggest that, overall, students' levels are moving towards the expected targets, with around half of the primary school students having reached or surpassed their target level of A2, and with 71% of secondary school students having already reached their target level of B1.

ISEI-IVEI (Basque Institute for Research and Evaluation in Education)

In addition to Cambridge ESOL's collaboration with Catholic schools in the Basque Country, Cambridge ESOL has also been working closely with ISEI-IVEI, the prestigious Basque Institute for Research and Evaluation in Education, which is maintained by the Basque Government Department of Education, Universities and Research. ISEI-IVEI is responsible for evaluating the non-university educational system, promoting educational research in the non-university sector, and maintaining a documentation and resource service related to the educational sector. Since 2004, ISEI-IVEI has been analysing the English skills, mainly of primary school age pupils, across both state-funded and privately funded schools, in which teaching might occur mainly through the medium of Basque, or primarily in Spanish, or through a mixture of Basque and Spanish. Last year, a trilingual programme was launched with the aim of improving the Spanish, Basque and English language skills of pupils in a range of private and public primary and secondary schools, with at least 20% of tuition having to be delivered in each of the three languages.

In order to evaluate the success of the programme in meeting established English language competency objectives, Cambridge ESOL was commissioned by ISEI-IVEI in April 2011 to produce benchmarking tests targeted at primary and secondary school pupils. For the primary school pupils, the benchmarking test covered reading and listening skills and for the secondary school students, Reading, Writing and Listening, with Speaking tests administered to a smaller sample. As with the other benchmarking tests provided by Cambridge ESOL, there was a range of task types reflecting authentic English usage, with all tasks drawn from the item banking system and fully calibrated to align them to the CEFR levels.

Administered over a three-year period, the most recent phase of the project involved administering benchmarking tests to over 1,000 primary school children aged 10–12 years, and over 500 secondary school children, aged 13–14. In subsequent sessions in May 2012 and May 2013, a similar representative sample of children will be examined.

Conclusions

These projects illustrate, how for many education authorities in Europe and beyond, bilingualism and trilingualism has become a central plank of government or regional educational policy and how, in order to achieve the targets set, English language learning has been firmly embedded within the school curriculum. To determine whether pupils are meeting agreed targets, their progress in English needs to be measured and evaluated. One of the most effective ways of doing this is through the collection of data gathered via benchmarking tests.

The Cambridge ESOL benchmarking system provides academic institutions, commercial organisations and policymakers with a comprehensive, evidence-based solution for assessing the language skills of groups. Its success has been proven in a range of environments and is based on reliable, trusted methodology together with Cambridge ESOL's extensive expertise in language skills assessment. It represents an affordable solution to situations where there have been requirements to provide an analysis of current levels of language ability, set new targets for language learning and raise standards of teaching and learning at local or national levels.

As illustrated in the case studies above, Cambridge ESOL works closely with clients to develop tailored solutions which match their precise needs. The methods used include a range of tried and tested diagnostic tools and other measurement devices to give an accurate reference point for language ability or performance, and include the creation of specific tests anchored to the Council of Europe Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. As discussed in a previous *Research Notes* article (Taylor and Jones 2006), the system of 'CEFR levels' was based in part on Cambridge ESOL levels and in turn, the levels of Cambridge examinations have been developed in response to Council of Europe initiatives. Hence the historical link between Cambridge levels and the CEFR is a close one.

Benchmarking tests provided by Cambridge ESOL can be based on existing Cambridge tests or developed specifically for projects depending on the requirements. Cambridge ESOL is uniquely placed to collaborate with the schools sector because of our existing work in developing exams specifically for young learners, and in developing versions of our General English exams which are targeted specifically at school-age candidates, such as *Cambridge English: Key for Schools, Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* and *Cambridge English: First for Schools*.

When interpreting benchmarking test results, apart from measuring them against international assessment standards, gaps in performance are identified and clients are advised how these may be remedied and students' performance improved. By means of the data and reports provided by Cambridge ESOL, clients can make informed decisions

on policy development, policy change or overall strategic direction. Aitor Bilbao, Director of Kristau Eskola (personal communication) explains the value and importance of the benchmarking exercise to the group of schools and their long-term objectives:

'Kristau Eskola's main objective for the implementation and standardisation of the English language assessment evaluations of our students is that of establishing the culture of continuous assessment as a means of improving the quality of our education system. To achieve this, we are relying on an institution of renowned prestige as is Cambridge ESOL. We firmly believe that this way, students, as well as teachers, headmasters and the families of our students will be able to actively contribute to the progressive normalisation of the English language in our schools, as this is one of the main aims of our linguistic framework requirements.'

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Vocabulary acquisition in children and Cambridge ESOL's wordlists for tests for young learners aged 7-14

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Introduction

Vocabulary is fundamental for language use. Being able to use a language is not just a simple matter of vocabulary size: learners need to know about a word's form, function and use – therefore both breadth and depth of vocabulary are important (Anderson & Freebody 1981). In other words, they need to know how a word is pronounced and spelled, what its morphological forms are, how it functions syntactically, how frequent it is, how it is used appropriately in different contexts, etc. A language user has several types of knowledge, which are not restricted to the area of lexis, e.g. the knowledge of:

a) what is formally possible (knowledge of phonological, lexical and morpho-syntactic rules)

b) what is psycholinguistically feasible (constrained by memory capacities)

c) what is sociolinguistically appropriate (context-related or context-governed aspects of meaning and use)

d) what is actually performed with high probability or frequency (knowledge of typicality).

Apart from these types of passive knowledge, language users need to be able to access, retrieve and produce words in real time – that is, they need to have skills of fluency, accuracy and appropriacy. In this article we will review some aspects of vocabulary learning related to these issues and how they are reflected in Cambridge ESOL's wordlists for tests of younger learners: *Cambridge English: Young Learners* (also known as *Young Learners English* or *YLE*), *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* (also known as *Key English Test for Schools* or *KET for Schools*) and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* (also known as *Preliminary English Test for Schools* or *PET for Schools*). Throughout this article, the acronyms *YLE*, *KET for Schools* and *PET for Schools* will be used.

Vocabulary size

As far as vocabulary size is concerned, Adolphs & Schmitt (2003) suggested that around 2,000–3,000 word families (comprising a base word and its inflections and morphological derivations: *differ, differs, differed, differing, different, differently, difference, differences*) are enough for basic everyday spoken conversation on a wide range of topics. It has been found that 90% of general texts are accounted for by the top most frequent 2,000 words (Nation 2006a). The suggestion that 2,000 word families are needed for a basic, functional vocabulary which represents a threshold level of vocabulary (Nation 2001:147) is supported by corroborating evidence from empirical research, wordlists, learner dictionaries, and graded readers.

Wordlists have been developed for general or instructional purposes either intuitively or empirically based on various native and learner corpora (such as *The Teacher's Word Book* by Thorndike 1921, *Basic English* by Ogden 1930, the *General Service List* by West 1953, or the *Cambridge English Lexicon* by Hindmarsh 1980 and the English Vocabulary Profile (EVP), see Capel 2010, Salamoura and Capel 2010b). Ogden's

(1930) *Basic English* comprises 850 word roots. The *General Service List* (West 1953) contains 2,000 high-frequency word families. The *Cambridge English Lexicon* developed by Hindmarsh (1980) contains 4,500 words based on word frequencies and English as a foreign language (EFL) practice. Thorndike's (1921) *The Teacher's Word Book* comprised a core vocabulary list of 10,000 frequently occurring words that Thorndike suggested should be prioritised in teaching or used to produce texts that would be more accessible to school children. Some dictionaries, such as the fifth edition of the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2009), indicate whether a word occurs amongst the 1,000, 2,000 or 3,000 most frequent words in spoken and written English respectively and the definitions of the entries use the most common 2,000 words.

Stages or levels of graded readers are conventionally defined according to the number of headwords in them (Day & Bamford 1998, Hill 1997a, b, 2001, 2008), some even linked to the six levels on the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe 2001): A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2 (e.g. Hill 2002). The *Cambridge English Readers* (www.cambridge.org/elt/readers) employ a restricted vocabulary of 250 words at Starter level; 400 words at Level 1 (A1); 800 words at Level 2 (A2); 1,300 words at Level 3 (B1); 1,900 words at Level 4 (B1+); 2,800 words at Level 5 (B2); and 3,800 words at Level 6 (C1). Macmillan's six levels range from 300 words at Starter level to 2,200 at Upper Intermediate, while Penguin starts at 200 words at Easystarts and moves through six levels to 3,000 words (Waring 2011). However, as Green (2011:138) found in his analysis, since the *Cambridge English Readers* are intended for unsupported or unsupervised reading, they are considerably easier to read than the textbooks and test materials designed to measure at the same level.

Vocabulary size in L1

Next we compare the word family threshold to some first language (L1) figures. Children after the age of 2 may have an average of 1,000 words in their L1 but use only a fraction of those. An early finding was that L1 children produce about 400 words at 2½ years of age (McCarthy 1954). More recent studies on L1 development show that children at the age of 3 only use around 120 unique word types per 100 utterances (Watkins, Kelly, Harbers & Hollis 1995). By the age of 6, they may know 8,000–14,000 words (Flowerdew & Miller 2005:22), but only use around 160 different word types per 100 utterances (Watkins et al 1995). Thus, native speakers of English may learn on average 1,000 words per year receptively, but are not able to use all of them (Nation & Webb 2011:634). The active productive vocabulary of an adult native speaker is said to contain at least 15,000–20,000 words. Goulden, Nation & Read (1990) suggested

that most native speakers have vocabularies in the region of 17,000 word families. However, average speakers of a language know (receptively/passively) from 45,000 to 60,000 words: this is the mental lexicon. Educated adults nowadays may well know (understand and potentially use) between 50,000 to 150,000 word forms (including affixes, roots, words and phrases), but they generally estimate their own vocabulary at only 1 to 10% of the actual level.

Vocabulary size in child L2

As we can see from above, vocabulary size measures can only be approximate, depending on how a word is defined. Children who learn a second language (L2) have been shown to learn around 500 words a year (Yoshida 1978). There is some evidence that they learn them faster than L1 native speaking children. Goldberg, Paradis & Crago (2008) demonstrated that minority L1 children in English as a second language (ESL) environments in the US catch up in about three years to their monolingual peers by age 7. Tabors (1997) noted that the first utterances produced by the ESL children are mainly single words such as object and colour names, or counting sequences. Then, children's first longer utterances in English tend to be either formulaic or telegraphic, meaning that they rely heavily on memorised or unanalysed phrases and use few grammatical morphemes. Wong Fillmore (1979), again in an ESL context in the US, lists several common formulae used repeatedly by the L2 children she observed in the early stages, for example *wait a minute*, *lemmesee*, or *whaddya wanna do*?

It has been suggested that children need to be exposed to words at least six times in reading (Cobb 2007), so beyond the 2,000 word family threshold accounting for 90% of general texts, the incidental learning opportunities tail off considerably (Hirsh & Nation 1992). However, the 2,000 word family threshold is adequate for Cambridge ESOL's tests for young learners. Schmitt (2011) suggests that *KET/ KET for Schools* (A2) candidates need at least 1,000 word families, *PET/PET for Schools* (B1) candidates need 1,500 word families, and *FCE/FCE for Schools* (B2) candidates need 2,000 word families for oral comprehension and 95% comprehension of general written texts.

Vocabulary growth is a good indicator of language development, and some L2 curricula have explicit vocabulary targets. One example is the Hungarian National Curriculum (Krizsán 2004) which includes active and passive vocabulary growth targets (see Table 1). Learners are expected to learn 350 words in their first year of learning English at age 8/9, but add only 150 in the second year of study. By the time learners take the érettségi vizsga (Matura, the Hungarian high school leaving exam) at the age of 17/18 at B1 level, they are supposed to know 3,000 words (Orosz 2009). This anticipates learning of about 260–270 words a year.

Table 1: Hungarian National Curriculum and expectation of vocabulary growth

Year group (age)	3 (8/9)	4 (9/10)	5 (10/11)	6 (11/12)	7 (12/13)	8 (13/14)
Number of lessons/week	2	2	3	3	3	3
Number of lessons/year	74	74	111	111	111	111
Active vocabulary	200	350	500	600	800	1,200
Passive vocabulary	150	150	200	250	300	400

However, Orosz (2009) found that learners in fact add in general 300 to 400 words to their vocabulary each year, more than the National Curriculum expects.

Factors affecting vocabulary development in L1 and L2

Vocabulary development is highly variable in both children's L1 and L2. In L1 acquisition, it has been strongly related to parents' socioeconomic status and education as well as to quantities and qualities of oral language exposure (e.g. Hoff 2003, Weizman & Snow 2001). Results of studies report long-term effects of rich lexical input on children's vocabulary years later, suggesting that the more parents and caregivers engage in meaningful, rich, diverse and complex interaction with children, the better the children's lexical repertoire will be. In L2 learning in an EFL context, vocabulary development is also dependent on rich lexical input and interaction (e.g. Ellis & Heimbach 1997, Ellis 1999, Enever 2011).

Orthography across languages

There is evidence (e.g. Ellis et al. 2004, Seymour, Aro & Erskine 2003) that when compared to other languages which use the Roman alphabet, English is more difficult to learn to read even for L1 native speakers, mainly because of the number of phonemes (44 in total), more complex syllable structures (many different syllable patterns with different consonant clusters at the beginning and end of words), and inconsistent grapheme–phoneme correspondences (e.g. *do/go, here/there, cough/bough*), rendering it a deep/opaque orthographic language (Katz & Frost 1992). Seymour, Aro & Erskine (2003) found reading ability delayed at least 2.5 years among English children when compared to their European counterparts due to the decoding difficulties the deep orthographic nature of English presents for them. French, Arabic, Chinese and Hebrew are other orthographically deep languages in which the reader needs to rely on strategies of reading such as reasoning, analogy to known spelling patterns, morphological processing, retrieving whole words from memory, using context, etc. Indeed, Arabic, Hebrew and Chinese children are supported initially by learning an elaborated version of their L1, supplemented, respectively, with vowels or diacritics to help with the pronunciation.

Vocabulary development and academic achievement in L1 and L2

Vocabulary size is a good indicator of overall linguistic performance (Meara & Jones 1988). It has also been shown that vocabulary acquisition is important for later reading comprehension and academic achievement in both L1 (e.g. Snow, Porche, Tabors & Harris 2007) and L2 learners (e.g. Droop & Verhoeven 2003, Garcia 2003, Verhallen & Schoonen 1998, Vermeer 2001). This is because after the most basic vocabulary is acquired, which is made up of mainly Anglo-Saxon/Germanic words that tend to be

monosyllabic (e.g. *the, all, have, time, say*), and combined to make compound words (e.g. *lunchtime*), learners have to acquire Latin/Greek vocabulary which is typical of academic discourse. These words are normally multisyllabic (e.g. *social, important, research, company, information*), have prefixes and suffixes (e.g. *-less, -ful, -able*), have stems that appear in other words as well (e.g. *soci-* in *society*), and usually carry a formal register. Normally there are pairs of Germanic and Latin words for the same concept: *get–obtain, make–construct, be–exist, see–perceive*.

When people enter education, their vocabulary grows according to their level of education and, later, their field of specialisation. 'Often the extent of one's vocabulary becomes a measure of intellect' (Stockwell & Minkova 2001:3). Corson (1997) refers to the lexical bar or barrier that needs to be overcome by gaining control, both receptively and productively, of the Greco-Latin vocabulary of English, in order to be able to achieve academically. Knowledge of word parts (with no more than 20–40 affixes) is especially useful for the acquisition of the Greek, Latin and French vocabulary in English (e.g. *progression* can be broken down to *pro-* (forward), *-gress-* (to move), *-ion* (noun)). Bauer & Nation (1993) provide a graded list of affixes based on frequency, regularity, productivity and predictability (Nation 2006b:592). They give different levels of difficulty for certain affixes: e.g. *-able* is listed at both Level 3 and Level 6, depending on the transparency of the affixation (*comfortable* versus *knowledgeable*).

The first 2,000 words cover 80% of academic tests (Coxhead 2000) and are therefore essential for content-based L2 learning as well (Nation & Webb 2011:633). However, a size of 8,000 word families in spoken language and 10,000 word families in written language is thought to be necessary for a wide vocabulary (Nation 2006a).

BICS and CALP

The distinction between the 2,000-word vocabulary that makes up the bulk of colloquial language (including words such as *hello, yeah, please*) and the Greco-Latin vocabulary necessary for education and academic success is reflected in Cummins' (1979) distinction between BICS (basic interpersonal communication skills) and CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency). The distinction was elaborated into two intersecting continua (Cummins 1981b, 2000) which highlighted the range of cognitive demands and contextual support involved in particular language tasks or activities (context-embedded/context-reduced, and cognitively undemanding/cognitively demanding).

Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) are needed in language use for social interaction within familiar contexts with lots of visual and contextual support, and require concrete, lower order cognitive processes/skills (identifying, naming/labelling, matching) and corresponding associative learning. However, the beginnings of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) relate to the use of language for learning in more context-reduced and cognitively demanding situations, employing abstract, higher order cognitive and metacognitive skills (reasoning, evaluating and justifying, understanding language as a system) and requiring conceptual learning involving a

qualitative change in understanding. The distinction between BICS and CALP is related to Bruner's (1975) communicative and analytic competence and Donaldson's (1978) embedded and disembedded language. The differences between spoken and written language (Biber 1986, McCarthy & Carter 1997) are relevant in this context.

Cummins (1981a) observed that while many ESL children develop functional conversational fluency (BICS) within two years of immersion in the target language, it takes between five and seven years for a child to be working on a level with native speakers as far as CALP is concerned (Collier 1987, Klesmer 1994, Scarcella 2002).

Literacy development in L2

In some learning contexts, young L2 learners, especially children, may not have achieved a sufficient and appropriate level of literacy in their L1 to be able to cope with the written version of the L2. This 'literacy skills lag' may affect their performance in L2 English since 'the written form of English creates [. . .] high cognitive and motor skill demands for pupils' and when confronted with written language they 'have a huge decoding and sense-making job to do' (Cameron 2003:108). Because of this literacy skills lag in young L2 learners which is said to characterise children up to the age of 9, child learners of L2 are usually hampered by their status as novice readers in their L1.

Similar to novice L1 readers, young L2 learners are faced with problems at the decoding level, such as recognition of letters of the alphabet, identifying the direction of the script on the page, grapheme–phoneme correspondences (the relationship between spelling and sound), word recognition (sight vocabulary), and comprehension at phrase level. These are processes which must take place before any syntactic parsing and comprehension of meaning can occur (Birch 2006).

Rixon (2007) considers how the reading and writing processes used by native English-speaking children when they learn to read and write their L1 could be used to inform what child L2 learners actually do when they are faced with the Roman script used in English and the less than transparent spelling system the English language employs. She suggests that L2 learners should be taught some of the specific reading and writing strategies L1 children are taught to use (such as analogy and rhyme) to be able to cope with the 'vagaries' of the written version of the English language.

Vocabulary in TEFL materials

Core vocabulary can be defined by maximum usefulness: frequent words that are widely and relatively evenly distributed among texts of different kinds, and words that can be used to define other words. The core vocabulary of English contains the most frequent word forms (the top 100 contains almost only function words, such as *the, of, and, to*, plus a few content words such as *think, know, time, people, two, see, way, first, new, say, man, little, good*) (cf. Carter 1987).

Both Nation & Webb (2011) and Beck, McKeown & Kucan (2002) suggest teaching vocabulary in three groups: 1)

basic frequent words used in everyday language, 2) useful sophisticated words of written language, i.e. academic vocabulary, and 3) low-frequency words specific to particular content areas.

Therefore, frequency is not the only criterion in wordlists for children and young learners. Instructional materials are usually organised thematically and therefore animals, being one of the favourite topics among children, feature highly in wordlists for children. Vassiliu (2001 cited in Milton 2009) for instance found that *dog* was the 15th most frequent word in some EFL books for children, and *look* and *say* featured among the first 15 words. Milton (2009) also discusses how vocabulary coverage differs from textbook to textbook for young learners, while keeping a common core vocabulary.

A recent worldwide survey among over 700 EFL teachers and professionals carried out by Cambridge ESOL (Papp, Galaczi, Chambers & Howden 2011) shows that vocabulary features among the most important elements of instructional materials used nowadays in primary and secondary schools.

Cambridge ESOL's YLE wordlists and vocabulary lists for KET and PET

The *Cambridge English: Young Learners* (*YLE*) tests were designed to test children's English language abilities between the ages of 7 and 12. As the three levels of the *YLE* tests (*Starters*, *Movers* and *Flyers*) are set at a relatively low proficiency level in the A band of the CEFR and below, the vocabulary basis of each is correspondingly small. For example, the *Starters* wordlist contains around 450 word entries. The syllabus for *Movers* both expands upon (with 340 new word entries) and subsumes that of *Starters*, and the syllabus for *Flyers* expands upon (with around 480 new word entries) and subsumes those of *Starters* and *Movers*. These figures correspond well with the figures of approximately 500 words that children have been shown to learn per year (Yoshida 1978) or the 300–400 words that they actually learn in an instructional context (Orosz 2009).

In the *YLE* wordlists there is awareness that words can be known receptively and/or productively by candidates. For instance, at the lowest *Starters* level which contains numbers 1–20, test writers are advised that they cannot ask 'How many children are there in your class?' or 'When's your birthday?' because, although the child may understand the question, they are not expected to have the language to respond. Due to the low level of the *YLE* tests, the language assessed in *YLE* texts is strictly limited to what is specified in the test specifications in terms of the use of allowable words and structures. The *YLE* word and structure lists (published in the *YLE Handbook for Teachers*) are regularly referred to during the editing phases of the test production process as these lists cannot be diverged from, even for untested lexical items of language. Two words on the list may be combined to make compounds if these are totally transparent, e.g. 'shoe shop', 'cheese sandwich' and 'tennis ball'.

The words as specified in the *YLE* wordlists for each level were derived from a review of materials used in communicative classrooms around the world during the test

development process between 1992 and 1997 (Taylor & Saville 2002). They are organised by topic and functions. The lexical items listed mainly involve the immediate physical and social environment of children (family, home, school, people) as well as their growing self-awareness (body, health, clothes, fruit) and typical interests (animals, toys, sports, the world of fantasy and fairy tales). These topics are universal and related to children's cognitive, emotional and social development. Children's use of language in chunks and prefabricated patterns is partially reflected in the YLE vocabulary lists, in expressions such as '*So do I*', '*How about …?*', etc.

The *Flyers* test is comparable to *KET for Schools* in terms of measurement difficulty (at A2 level of the CEFR) but the lexis, topics and contexts covered are suitable for a younger age group (the target candidature in *Flyers* is up to 12-year-olds and *KET for Schools* between 11 and 14 year olds). The *KET/KET for Schools* vocabulary list contains around 1,500 single lexical entries, while the *PET/PET for Schools* vocabulary list, which subsumes all *KET/KET for Schools* items, contains around 2,900 single lexical entries.

The vocabulary list for PET (B1) was initially based on the Council of Europe *Threshold* syllabus (Van Ek 1975, Van Ek with Alexander 1976, Van Ek & Trim 1990a) and that of *KET* (A2) on the Council of Europe *Waystage* syllabus (Van Ek & Trim 1990b). These Cambridge ESOL vocabulary lists are updated on a regular basis by reference to a number of learner and native-speaker corpora (Ball 2002). In 2006 the lists were also made available to download from the Cambridge ESOL website. There is no vocabulary specification for Cambridge ESOL exams above the CEFR B1 level, so *FCE for Schools* test writers use other high-frequency or otherwise appropriate words from corpus evidence, including the cumulative store of vocabulary at A1–B2 levels, including words, senses and phrases that appear as new at B2 in the *English Vocabulary Profile* (EVP) database (Capel 2010, Salamoura & Capel 2010). The EVP database, which is partly based on words that learners actually use in written production in the Cambridge Learner Corpus, has also derived information on levels from various native-speaker corpora and wordlists from readers and course books. It contains more words at each level than the Cambridge ESOL wordlists (e.g. at A2 level approximately 5% more than in the *KET/KET for Schools* vocabulary list). The regular updates of Cambridge ESOL wordlists take into account evidence from the EVP in order to ensure that the wordlists reflect current vocabulary usage by learners and native speakers.

Figures 1 and 2 show the CEFR level of lexical items in Cambridge ESOL's wordlists based on the EVP. As expected, there is a general decrease of A1 vocabulary and increase of A2 vocabulary among the three YLE wordlists, as they are designed to test at pre-A1 (*Starters*), A1 (*Movers*) and A2 (*Flyers*) levels. The *KET/KET for Schools* vocabulary list (also at A2) contains a similar proportion of A1 and A2 vocabulary to *YLE Flyers*. B1-level vocabulary is present throughout the vocabulary lists to a small extent (*Movers* includes 10% and *Flyers* about 8%), while in the *PET/PET for Schools* vocabulary list about half of the words are at B1 level. This finding is not surprising since the EVP was based partly on learner performance data (mainly written language) by learners

aged 11+ from Cambridge ESOL exams and partly on other native corpora (Capel 2010, Salamoura & Capel 2010). A few words are not in the EVP (such as: *hippo*, *lizard* and *watermelon* in *Starters*; *panda* and *bat* in *Movers*; *rucksack*, *sledge* and *snowman*, in *Flyers*). A very small number of words are listed at a different level in EVP from those of the YLE wordlists (e.g. *badminton*, *baseball*, and *robot* in *Starters*; *shark*, *cinema* and *film* in *Movers*; *ambulance*, *biscuit* and *pyramid* in *Flyers*), again for reasons of appropriacy of topic to the younger age group and to be able to describe their school and home environment and general interests. Figure 2 compares the Cambridge ESOL wordlists, and highlights the similarities and slight differences between the *Flyers* and *KET/KET for Schools* wordlists in terms of EVP coverage. Mismatches between EVP and Cambridge ESOL wordlists include mostly taboo items such as *bar*, *hospital* and *die*, in EVP, as well as words which are more adult-like topics and are therefore missing in the YLE *Starters* and *Movers* wordlists, e.g.: *business, credit card, hotel* and *job*. At A2 level, items in EVP but not in *YLE* wordlists are words such as *accident, angry, blood* and *dead*, because some of them are taboo or may upset children; also, items such as *cash, boss and biology* are missing as they are related to more adult-like topics.

Some examples of taboo items in EVP A2 but not in *KET/KETfS* or *PET/PETfS* are *alcohol, cancer, murderer, monster* and *snake*, some of which are associated with culturally or otherwise sensitive issues.

Figure 1: Percentage of EVP words in Cambridge ESOL wordlists by CEFR level
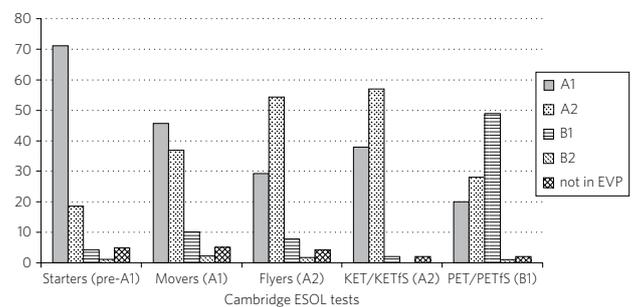
Figure 2: Coverage of EVP words in Cambridge ESOL wordlists
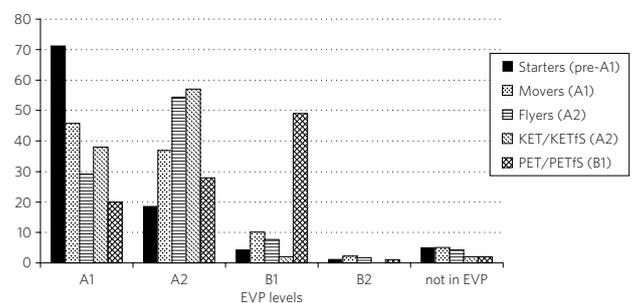
The EVP is a comprehensive database of vocabulary learning and usage, which, as mentioned before, is increasingly consulted in Cambridge ESOL test construction along with the Cambridge ESOL wordlists. In the EVP, the entry for each headword presents individual senses (different meanings of the word) and phrases in order of CEFR levels, reflecting the growing depth of vocabulary

knowledge at each level. Combinations of single entries (as compound words, phrases, phrasal verbs and idioms) also differ across proficiency levels. A major strand of EVP research has been in defining the relative levels of word family members. For example, *differ* is a lower frequency word for native speakers and is less 'useful' for intermediate learners than, say, *different* (Capel 2010, Good 2010, Salamoura & Capel 2010). This is partly why the list of 'allowable' affixes has been taken out of the new *PET/PET for Schools* vocabulary list recently, as prefixes and suffixes are listed at different levels in the EVP.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of lexical types in Cambridge ESOL wordlists compared with those in the corresponding EVP levels, according to whether they are among the first 1,000, or second 2,000 words, or whether they are academic, or 'other' types, using Cobb's Web VocabProfile (Cobb 2011). The data for YLE shows a relatively high proportion of items not in the first 2,000 words or the academic wordlist (see Other words in Figure 3). These items are relevant for children's interests and immediate home and educational environment, such as 73 items in *Starters* (e.g. *alien*, *hippo* and *kite*), 51 items in *Movers* (e.g. *bat*, *clown* and *naughty*), 81 items at *Flyers* (e.g. *airport, biscuit* and *circus*), 280 items in *KET/KET for Schools* and 662 items in *PET/PET for Schools*. Academic words (AWL) (Coxhead 2000), which almost do not feature at all in *Starters* and *Movers*, start to appear and continually increase in the Cambridge ESOL wordlists from A2 level, including one word each at *Starters* and *Movers* (*computer* and *text*), and nine in *Flyers* (e.g. *channel, environment* and *uniform*), 31 in *KET/KET for Schools* (e.g. *adult, area, instructions* and *licence*), and 161 in *PET/PET for Schools* (e.g. *accommodation, benefit* and *concentrate*). Even though the 'academic words' (words from Coxhead's (2000) Academic Word List) were derived from a corpus of texts from a variety of academic disciplines, not all of them are technical, and some are used outside academic contexts (e.g. *television, newspapers*). As can be seen from some of the examples above, the academic words in Cambridge ESOL wordlists are not technical/discipline-specific.

Figure 3: General and academic words in Cambridge ESOL's wordlists
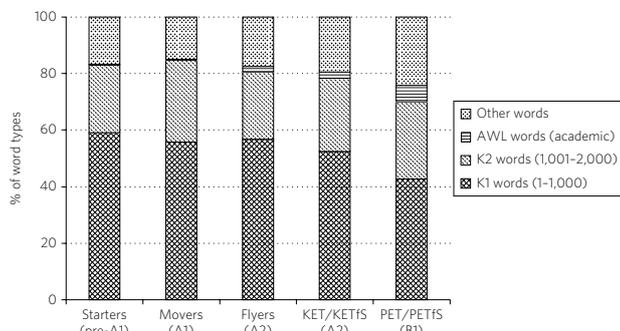

Figure 4 shows the proportion of new phrases and phrasal verbs at each level, which gradually increases in Cambridge ESOL wordlists, with the exception of *Flyers* where the percentages could be higher to approximate that of *KET/KET for Schools*.

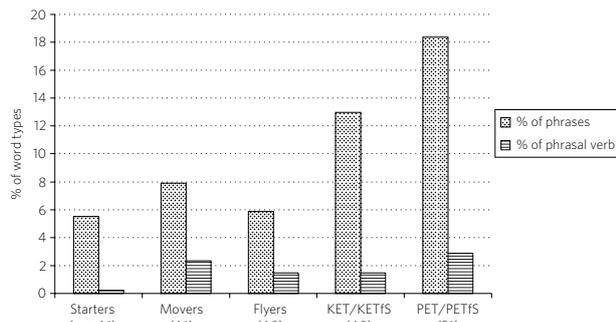**Figure 4: Types of lexical items in Cambridge ESOL's wordlists**

Table 2 and Table 3 show a selection of examples of phrases and phrasal verbs (respectively) present in Cambridge ESOL wordlists. They also feature in Martinez and Schmitt's (under review) PHRASE list which classifies phrases and phrasal verbs according to their frequency in the British National Corpus (1K for first most frequent 1,000 lexical items, 2K for the second 1,000 and so on).

Finally, Figure 5 shows the proportion of Anglo-Saxon versus Greek, Latin and French words in Cambridge ESOL's wordlists. The data in Figure 5 shows that the proportion of Anglo-Saxon words used in BICS is higher in *YLE* levels compared to Greek, Latin and French words, again, with the exception of *Flyers* where the proportions are more similar. The Greco-Latin and French stock of vocabulary needed in CALP gradually increases in Cambridge ESOL's tests for young learners, and almost equals the Anglo-Saxon words at *PET for Schools* level, in line with the increase in age and educational level of the target candidatures in these exams.

Figure 5: Anglo-Saxon versus Greek/Latin/French words in Cambridge ESOL's wordlists
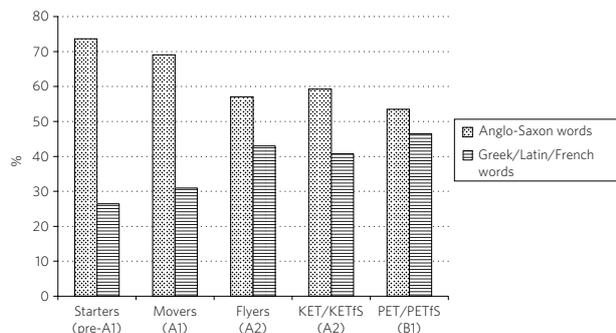
From this analysis, it can be seen that Cambridge ESOL's wordlists are roughly in line with the vocabulary learning progress of learners as evidenced in the developmental literature and EVP research. The differences between Cambridge ESOL wordlists and the EVP database are due to the origin of the two: Cambridge ESOL wordlists predate the EVP and were originally based on the T-series specifications, whereas the EVP database draws on a wide range of evidence, including learner production data from Cambridge ESOL exams. The contents and treatment of the Cambridge ESOL wordlists at test construction and development, at least to some extent, reflect the distinction between receptive and productive vocabulary. EVP research

Table 2: Examples of new phrases in Cambridge ESOL wordlists according to their level of frequency in the BNC (Martinez and Schmitt, under review)

	1K	2K	3K	4K	5K
Starters	there is/are have (got) NP	in front of	next to lots of	oh dear	
Movers	have to V	all right come on have got to V	what about	good at	how about
Flyers	a few a little of course	look like make sure	feel like		
KET/KETfS	as well as a bit of at least	as well	at the same time	for sale	as good as never mind
PET/PETfS	in fact in order to rather than a lot	in addition apart from due to instead of manage to no one in particular take place	at first at last at once at present in the end in time part time in spite of take part in	in advance first of all could hardly key to on board up to up to date a long way	fond of

Table 3: Examples of new phrasal verbs in Cambridge ESOL wordlists according to their level of frequency in the BNC (Martinez and Schmitt, under review)

	1K	2K	3K	4K	5K
Starters		pick up			
Movers		look for	get off get up	take off	get on
Flyers		find out	get to go out look after turn on		
KET/KETfS					fill in
PET/PETfS	go on deal with	call for carry out set out set up take up	care for carry on end up get back give up go for go off look forward to turn up work out	break up bring up get on with keep up put up run out set off turn into	hold up keep on turn down take care of

will continue to inform the development of Cambridge ESOL wordlists with regard to issues such as what we know about members of word families, the development of affixes, phrases and phrasal verbs in learners, and the kind of vocabulary they need in different domains of language use (general vs. academic). Now we turn to a recent update of the *YLE* wordlists as an example of the regular update of these wordlists.

Updating the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* vocabulary lists

Background

As discussed above, *YLE* vocabulary lists are an essential element of the tests: they form the basis of the syllabus, and are made publicly available in the *YLE Handbook for Teachers* and on the Cambridge ESOL public website.

The *YLE* vocabulary lists are updated periodically – additions and level changes (e.g. introducing a word at *Movers* level rather than *Flyers*) are suggested by the teams

of test writers. The most recent review took place in 2010, the main intentions being:

- to take advantage of the recent research carried out by the EVP project on A1 and A2 wordlists

- to bring the *Flyers* vocabulary lists more in line with the *KET/KET for Schools* vocabulary lists, reflecting their shared A2 positioning on the CEFR

- to increase flexibility in terms of item combination for the test writing teams at the stage of constructing live tests

- to increase the natural feel of written and recorded dialogues and allow Speaking examiners a greater degree of authenticity in their conversations with candidates

- to have positive washback on candidates and their teachers, by effectively testing children on a greater number of words that they are encountering and using on a frequent basis in today's world.

Procedure

After an initial meeting of Cambridge ESOL Assessment and Operations, and Research and Validation staff and the

chairs (external consulting experts) of the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* papers (Listening, Reading & Writing and Speaking), each chair was commissioned to submit a list of suggestions for additions and level changes to the existing YLE vocabulary lists. They were asked to take the EVP research into consideration in compiling their suggestions. Each of the three Chairs came up with between 40 and 80 changes that they wished to table for discussion. At the same time, Wordsmith Tools were used to perform a comparative analysis of the existing vocabulary lists for *Starters* and *Movers*, *Movers* and *Flyers*, *Flyers* and *KET/ KET for Schools* in terms of coverage. These ESOL wordlists were also compared to the high-frequency words published as the appendix of the *National Literacy Strategy Framework for Teaching* (DfEE 1998) and the *Letters and Sounds* high-frequency words (DfES 2007) to be able to reflect on what is required of L1 native English speaking children in the UK, and the EVP database.

ESOL staff from both the Assessment and Operations, and Research and Validation divisions then met to discuss the data and define general criteria for accepting or rejecting the suggestions made by the chairs. The agreed selection criteria were as follows:

- if a suggested word appears on the *KET/KET for Schools* vocabulary lists, it should be accepted at *Flyers* level

- if a suggested word appears at the correct level in the EVP, it should be accepted at that level

- if there is evidence from the EVP or Wordsmith wordlist comparison data that a word should change level (i.e. be introduced at the earlier level), this change should be made

- if there is evidence from the National Curriculum list of high-frequency words (which English schoolchildren are expected to recognise and produce) that a word should be included at a particular level, it should be accepted.

It was also decided that as experienced ESOL professionals, this panel of staff members was well placed to adjudicate on the suitability of words for inclusion or omission. If the demands of the tests meant that any of the above criteria needed to be overruled, then it was agreed that this would be sanctioned.

A final meeting of the same panel was held in order to review systematically each suggested change, according to the agreed criteria. The vocabulary lists were subsequently changed to reflect the decisions taken at the final review meeting, and the updated lists forwarded to the chairs for their final approval.

Outcomes

In total, over 120 words and phrases were added to the vocabulary lists at the last review, and there were also numerous level changes. Below are some examples of changes that were made:

- The word *backpack* was introduced at *Flyers* level. The word *rucksack* was already present at *Flyers* level, but it was agreed that the US variant *backpack* (at A2 level in the US version of the EVP) is now used more commonly worldwide and is included in the *KET/KET for Schools* wordlists, so merits inclusion.

- The word *balloon* was introduced at *Starters* level. While the EVP includes 'balloon' at A2 level, the theme of parties is particularly common in the *YLE* Speaking paper at *all* levels and the panel deemed it worthy of introduction at *Starters* for this reason.

- The word *music* was changed from *Movers* to *Starters* level. The words *piano*, *guitar* and *singing* all appear at *Starters* level and it was felt that *music* should be added at this level to expand the lexical set. The EVP includes *music* at A1 level.

- The words *mouse* and *keyboard* were introduced at *Starters* level, reflecting the growing influence of ICT in the school and home. The EVP includes both words at A2 level, but the panel felt that they were necessary at *Starters* level as they feature in numerous pictures of the home and school environment.

- The expression *Don't worry* was introduced at *Starters* level. It features at A1 on the EVP and was deemed useful in facilitating natural, authentic-sounding dialogue.

- Several proper nouns for people's names were added to the lists *(George, Holly, Dan)* to expand the set already available – helping to ensure a good spread of names for the characters who feature in the dialogues and stories.

The approved lists have now been included in the revised *Cambridge English: Young Learners Handbook for Teachers* (scheduled release date October 2011) and the new words will feature in live *Cambridge English: Young Learners* tests from 2014 onwards.

Conclusion

In this article we showed how research on children's vocabulary acquisition and instructional learning informs Cambridge ESOL's wordlists for tests for young learners. Just like with the development of the EVP, it is not anticipated that this most recent review on *YLE* wordlists has produced definitive, exhaustive lists – far from it. As both the English language and the profile of the candidature for *YLE* tests and the '*for Schools*' examinations are rapidly evolving, it is envisaged that subsequent revisions will continue to be necessary at periodic intervals to all Cambridge ESOL wordlists.

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Textbook recordings - an effective support for non-native-speaker teachers

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Introduction

As a non-native-speaker teacher involved in teaching English as a foreign language, I have always been interested in knowing what teaching techniques can be employed by both native-speaker teachers and Vietnamese language teachers to assist Vietnamese young learners (aged between 7 and 12) in developing correct pronunciation, the ability to understanding what they hear and responding to spoken questions with short answers.

This article aims to highlight the advantages of textbook recordings, which are minimum teaching aids Vietnamese teachers have in teaching English to primary learners. The purpose of the study is to explore whether using textbook recordings might help young learners meet the assessment criteria of listening and speaking tests in *Cambridge English: Young Learners* examinations (aka *Young Learners English* or *YLE*). The findings of this study suggest that if Vietnamese teachers, who do not have high levels of proficiency in English, know how to use available teaching

aids appropriately and creatively, they can gradually overcome the discrepancy between a non-native and a native-speaker teacher in terms of their students' level of achievement in developing native-like pronunciation, listening comprehension and the ability to respond to spoken questions with short answers.

Research purpose

The first issue which inspired my research was the fact that Vietnamese young learners who study English with native-speaker teachers develop more precise pronunciation and more fluent interaction than those who study English with Vietnamese teachers alone. They are also more successful in getting Cambridge ESOL certificates. This leads young learners' parents to believe that studying English with native-speaker teachers is a requisite for using English efficiently (Nunan 2003:608) and obtaining internationally renowned certificates. Accordingly, the requirements of Cambridge ESOL *YLE* Listening and Speaking tests are challenges for me as a teacher who is not a native speaker of English.

Another concern of the present research is that Vietnamese young learners pay much higher school fees to learn English with native-speaker teachers than they do for local teachers. This situation is causing an illogical inequality in state primary education in particular. More importantly, a group of young learners' parents asked me how I might improve English language teaching without the presence of a native speaker, and whether I might accept a flexible timetable for their children. The desire to meet their expectations inspired me to consider using available audio-CDs with text recordings as a substitute for a native speaker's accent in class.

In addition, my interview with a Cambridge ESOL representative in Ho Chi Minh City (Cambridge ESOL being a strategic partner of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in Vietnam, in supporting and supervising projects which aim to develop the learning and teaching of English) revealed that the limitations of Vietnamese teachers' proficiency in English and teaching knowledge have a major impact on their teaching practice. The drawbacks are that they lack proficiency in productive skills in English, having never worked in an interactive international environment, lacking detailed information on international examinations and correct pronunciation. Furthermore, the teaching methods they use are more suited to adults than children. Accordingly, there is an urgent need to evaluate and enhance Vietnamese teachers' language and teaching competence. The interview helped me select data for this report, adapt my research objective and look for more appropriate teaching methods for leading Vietnamese young learners to Cambridge ESOL examinations most effectively.

Context

This qualitative research was inspired by parents of three young learners who were seeking a Vietnamese language teacher to teach their children at home, starting in 2001. The timetable was arranged for two days a week with 1 hour and 30 minutes per class. A reason behind the parents' choice was that they felt there was no guarantee of teaching quality across all foreign language centres in Ho Chi Minh City, as a large number of teachers were not native speakers, coming from different continents such as Europe, America, Asia and even Africa. They did not have the relevant backgrounds or teaching certificates for English. Many were either tourists (usually called '*Tây ba lô*' by the Vietnamese) or people who were looking for a job in Vietnam. Another reason for the timetabling was that it could be flexibly negotiated between the teacher and parents when necessary. It was explained that moving between their workplace and their children's schools with fixed schedules was potentially a significant inconvenience.

Participants involved in this research are cousins: one is 7 years old and the others are 8 and 10. Two of them are female. None had studied English before I started teaching them, which was advantageous for the purposes of this study: the findings on the effect of my teaching method would not be limited by their previous experience in learning English.

Pressure came from the fact that the participants' parents were a pharmacist and a businessman, who were working in multinational companies; they knew English well enough to follow their children's progress and were ready to discuss relevant teaching methods with the teacher.

Theoretical background

It is regrettable that there is no available local research on the teaching of young learners of English in Vietnam. Through discussions with a highly qualified teacher, who is working for Cambridge ESOL, I have found out that the majority of Vietnamese teachers–researchers are teaching at tertiary education level, and participants of their research are usually focused on people aged 16 and older. Whilst English is being introduced as a compulsory subject at younger and younger ages by governments of other countries in the world (Nunan 2003:591), English is only just being considered as a pilot subject, called *tiếng Anh tăng cường*, at a small number of primary schools focused in urban areas in Vietnam. This is explained by many reasons, such as lack of suitably equipped classrooms as well as inconsistencies of curricula and textbooks for young learners; additionally, a shortage of English teachers is preventing the English pilot programme from widespread implementation (Lâm 2010, Tú Uyên 2011). Most importantly, limitations of local teachers' language ability and teaching knowledge are key problems in developing English as a compulsory subject on a large scale. Evidence shows that among 600 English teachers assessed recently to determine how proficient they are in English, the majority just reached A1 level on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2001), while 260 obtained Level A2 (Nguyễn 2011).

Nunan (2003:608) suggested that teachers who lack proficiency in the target language can take the advantage of technological support. Audio recordings of texts, for example, are usually considered an integral part of English textbooks. Even though they co-exist so frequently, it was

difficult to find literature that showed how to use them effectively in the classroom or to improve aspects of the learning process. Through informal interviews, I have found that my colleagues use text recordings simply to introduce dialogues, vocabulary or reading texts to learners. Other than that, they do not have plans to improve any specific skills. The goal of my research is to explore a different approach in using text (audio) recordings in order to help my students develop correct pronunciation, a good level of comprehension of spoken input and ability to respond to spoken questions.

There were a number of perspectives from the literature that certainly supported the present research study and influenced the teaching ideas I put in place. For example, age is considered as one of the factors that strongly influence learners' second language (L2) acquisition (Ellis 1985:105), especially age of the beginning instruction (Nunan 2003:589). Harmer (2007:81) also states that young learners are people who are able to acquire English more quickly and develop productive skills better than other age groups. They can mimic accents accurately, whilst older learners (from the age of 12) have differing strengths. Therefore, the previous research led me to consider how to use text recordings in order to help learners achieve pronunciation as close as possible to that of native speakers, and to develop their listening comprehension and ability to respond to spoken questions.

Ability to understand the characteristics and needs of young learners is also crucial for teachers: 'young learners need good oral skills in English since speaking and listening are the skills which will be used most of all at this age' (Harmer 2007:83). Accordingly, it requires teachers with correspondingly proficient skills and enthusiasm. I fully agree with Nunan (2003:607) that teachers who lack English language proficiency cannot provide learners with rich input required for effective English acquisition. This might explain why many Vietnamese language teachers tend to impose their teaching on learners rather than foster their learning processes. They perhaps aim to avoid showing their lack of proficiency in English. Larsen-Freeman (2000:54) advises that teaching should aim to support the learning process rather than control it.

Research (Nunan 2003:608, Harmer 2007:118) shows that there is a phenomenon called '*native-speakerism*' in language classrooms around the world. A number of learners think that learning English with native-speaker teachers will be better. However, local teachers also have many advantages over native teachers, such as a similar experience of learning English, speaking the same first language (L1), having the same culture. These can help learners avoid what are called 'cultural shocks' i.e. misunderstanding, as well as take advantage of the L1 in bringing beneficial effects to fluency achievement (Harmer 2007:119). One function of native-speaker teachers is to immerse young learners in English. Yet it is probably not feasible to expect that teaching English to Vietnamese young learners in Vietnam can depend completely on native teachers. Therefore, the important issue in the long run is: how to equip Vietnamese teachers with both proficiency in English and the skills to highlight features of language which are naturally exhibited by native speakers (Nunan 2003:608).

Methodology

My method of qualitative research is based on the claim of Dörnyei's (2007:37) that 'ideally, qualitative researchers enter the research process with a completely open mind and without setting out to test preconceived hypotheses'. Additionally, the main characteristics of qualitative research are identified as being: emergent, naturalistic, observational, descriptive, subjective and ungeneralisable (Dörnyei 2007:37). My considerations at the beginning of the study were suitable for this method. The first consideration aimed to explore whether the use of text recordings could help learners achieve the level of pronunciation and interaction (listening comprehension and responding to spoken questions) required by Cambridge ESOL examinations. I realised that this would be a longitudinal process and varying results would gradually emerge throughout the exploration. Particularly, I could not fix scheduled syllabuses for the length of each level of *YLE Starters*, *Movers* and *Flyers* or for taking Cambridge ESOL examinations. The decision about the timetable of Cambridge *YLE* examinations completely depended on the speed of the learners' acquisition in practice and whether they were equipped with crucial skills for achieving the best results.

For the period of conducting the investigation from 2001 to 2008, the only instrument for data collection I implemented was observation. I observed my own teaching as well as the learners' progress through their outputs, step-by-step, from start to finish. The additional tools were included in the data collection process, such as a questionnaire filled out by teachers (designed to enquire into their teaching practices) and unstructured interviews with my pupils and their parents.

A questionnaire

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was also emailed to four Vietnamese teachers, who teach English to young learners at three primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City. The questionnaire responses reveal the teaching methods they use as well as their drawbacks in practice.

Unstructured interviews

The purpose of conducting unstructured interviews was to investigate how learners felt about the learning process and what difficulties they had in taking the speaking and listening components of Cambridge *YLE* examinations. Their parents were also interviewed with a view to discovering their opinions on their children's achievements as well as to measuring their satisfaction.

I obtained the parents' consent to use the data I collected while teaching their children between 2001 and 2008, and asked them to email me the copies of Cambridge ESOL certificates obtained by my students during the process of the study, as evidence of their achievement.

The sequence of teaching

Being aware of young learners' capacity for imitation of their teacher's pronunciation (Harmer 2007:81), I considered employing available native-speaker dialogues recorded on CDs as a possible way to imprint the sounds of English in the learners' memories and encourage their imitation.

I structured my teaching steps in the following way. The learners first started listening to dialogues played on CDs at least twice in order to recognise native speakers' sounds and intonation by themselves. The learners then listened to CDs and repeated sentences chorally. I would simply pause or re-wind the CDs in case the learners could not repeat the sounds of some words. The meanings of new words were introduced during the process of listening. The aim was to assist the learners with their pronunciation, and enable the guessing of phrase or sentence meaning in the context associated with looking at the pictures in the textbook. In order to check if the learners had understood the dialogues and to interact with them, I would pause the CDs with spoken input and ask the learners to respond to my mixed questions such as *'when', 'where', 'what', 'who', 'is it . . . ?', 'do you . . . ?'*, etc.

Since the learners in this study were still acquiring their first language (Vietnamese) the understanding of some English expressions was an inevitable challenge for them. Using Vietnamese was evidently useful for the learners to notice differences between their L1 and the target language. Realising the effect of learners' L1 on learners' second language acquisition in this age group (also attested by Ellis 1985:19 and Harmer 2007:133), I applied translation with choral repetition to improve the learners' comprehension and expression (see Harmer 2007:133). As a final step, the learners listened to the CDs and wrote down the dialogues for reinforcement.

To stimulate the learners' working memory, learning dialogues by heart was assigned to them as their homework in order to engrave the pronunciation of words, intonation and native speakers' accent in their minds. The next step required the learners to act out dialogues (learned by heart) in order to make them feel more comfortable about interacting in English. At this stage, I also started asking questions about the learners' own lives to lead them to respond with different and extended answers and encourage independent oral expression of thoughts in English.

Research findings

The focus of the present research is on the teaching method I developed. The method was based on the use of audio textbook recordings and was used to help Vietnamese young learners achieve native-like pronunciation and develop listening comprehension, as well as the ability to respond to spoken questions.

Questionnaire results

The data based on the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) showed that audio-CDs, flashcards and the teachers' books were the teaching aids available to some Vietnamese teachers at primary schools. The teachers who responded to my questionnaire generally prioritised different skills: one teacher said that required skills were speaking and listening, the rest believed that all four basic skills were equally important. With regard to teaching pronunciation, the teachers mainly asked learners to imitate their pronunciation. Surprisingly, half of the teachers questioned taught pronunciation, listening and speaking with the same method.

One of them reported that she would simply give examples and ask her learners to repeat them. If learners made errors, she would correct them. The data revealed that Vietnamese was unavoidable in the classrooms. The teachers' own evaluation was that many of their colleagues did not have appropriate skills required for teaching English. Findings confirmed Nunan's (2003:607) view that lack of professional skills and effective teaching methods were crucial drawbacks for local teachers' instruction. The instructional sequences being used in the classroom by the teachers were evidently in place to control the learners' learning process rather than support it (Larsen-Freeman 2000:54).

Observation and interview results

I used my data to explore the impact of textbook recordings as a substitute for a variety of native speakers' accents on learners' achievement of native-like pronunciation, as well as interactive listening ability.

Pronunciation

I did not accurately predict the outcome of my research. In practice, what I observed was that participants in this research could attain correct pronunciation and develop oral/aural skills and interaction better than I had thought thanks to listening to textbook recordings continuously, which could be regarded as a method of immersion in English. The instructional sequence was carried out quite slowly during the use of Book 1: *Get Set Go*. I had to be patient, playing the CDs many times for the benefit of the learners' recognition and practice until I was satisfied with their pronunciation and understanding.

The use of recorded dialogues evidently improved the learners' imitation of pronunciation, intonation and native-speaker accents. I found that the learners' imagination was stimulated by sounds of dialogue in contexts. Thanks to this, they could concentrate on the dialogues and try to understand them. Nevertheless, the participants evidently had certain difficulties when they first tried to produce some English words that were markedly different from Vietnamese words, such as those with the sound */s/* in them, short forms of *I've got/he's got*, consonant clusters with *bl_* in *blue/black*, *gr_* in *green*, *cl_* in *clown*, *br_* in *brown/brother*, *gr_* in *grandfather/grandmother*, *sn_* in *snake*, *fl_* in *fly*, *thr_* in *three* and the difference between the sound */s/* and */z/* at the end of some verbs and plural nouns.

After overcoming the initial struggle with pronunciation, the young learners showed that they could follow spoken input and understand textbook recordings more easily. In addition, the need for rewinding the CDs significantly decreased and the learning process became faster. The learners also enjoyed trying to imitate animal noises and different pitches of native-speaker accents. Overall, what they mastered from the start of teaching of the learning process had long-time benefits. Ellis (1985:105) emphasised that young learners acquired a level of pronunciation superior to that of other age groups. My own observation showed that the young learners could maintain the emerging habits of the young learners when they became older (12 to 16 years). At this stage, the learners started encountering long reading texts and stories; the habit of listening and responding enabled fast comprehension of a text and ease in answering

questions. What is more, the habit of learning lexis through word phrases or chunks helped the learners avoid word-by-word translation in oral production and develop their reading skills better. More importantly, the learners could overcome long pauses and hesitation in speech.

However, it emerged that learners' imitation of a native-like accent was prominent only at the levels of *Starters* and *Movers*, and it tended to decline as the learners got older (12 to 15 years). This phenomenon appeared when the learners started studying at grade 6 (12 years), which is when English becomes a compulsory subject at school. In the light of that, it is very likely that the teachers' strong Vietnamese accent when speaking English is likely to have impacted on my learners' pronunciation. In particular, two participants showed their shyness at imitating (English) native-speaker accents and the Vietnamese accent was present in their oral production. They no longer paid attention to intonation. One out of three students of mine still kept her native-like attainment in pronunciation because of her preferences. Another one stated in the interview that she did not like imitating native-like accents as the effect of her Vietnamese accent was unavoidable to her. My third student said that he could not speak English like native speakers, but he could not explain why. What this showed was that 'preference' was also essential for the learners' maintaining the acquired native-like accents in the Vietnamese context.

Developing interactive listening ability

My longitudinal observation revealed that interactive listening ability (listening comprehension and ability to respond to spoken questions) was brought about by pausing the spoken input to elicit learners' understanding with mixed questions. This task pushed the learners to react to what they heard. At the period of the first few months, I saw that the learners often had to pause for a long time to think before answering the questions. Unsurprisingly, the most common pause fillers participants used were *uh* and *um*, and the repetition of a single word. Gradually, when they were accustomed to both listening and responding, they showed active and fluent interaction. In my opinion, two factors contributed to the development of the learners' effective interactive listening ability: a) the well-organised unit structure of *Get Set Go* textbooks and b) the introduction of lexis through word phrases rather than single words. The unit structure of *Get Set Go* led me to require of my learners that they listen and respond without transcripts. Recognising that the new units of Book 2 were structured based on the knowledge of Book 1, I asked the learners to no longer look at the book while they were undergoing the above-mentioned sequence. It clearly activated learners' working memory. I found that learners did not actually practise listening skills if they continued looking at the transcripts. It meant that they focused on reading instead of listening for comprehension. Vocabulary introduced with phrases rather than single words facilitated learners' understanding and encouraged more fluent interaction.

Achievements

It was evident that selecting what level of examination to take was the parents' decision. This was why there were no *Starters* certificates available for evidence in this article,

or why one in three participants did not take the *Flyers* test. Results from Cambridge Esol *Movers* and *Flyers* examinations (see Appendix 2) showed the participants could meet the requirements of the Cambridge ESOL *YLE* tests. I could not be present at the examinations to analyse data of their output, but the feedback from my pupils revealed that they did not have any difficulties in interacting with the examiners, who were native speakers of English. Additionally, the examiners' questions were short and very easy for them to answer. They themselves also said that playing CDs and listening associated with responding without transcripts evidently improved their pronunciation, listening skills and interaction ability. My pupils also proceeded to take *Cambridge English: Key* (aka *Key English Test* or *KET*) and *Cambridge English: Preliminary* (aka *Preliminary English Test* or *PET*) examinations.

Findings from the interview with the parents of my pupils revealed that they had registered them for an English course with English native teachers at an international language centre, as they had been afraid that their children would not be able to communicate with native speakers if they just studied with the local teacher. However, the pupils reported to their parents after the course that no problems had arisen from studying with both the native-speaker teacher and the local teacher. The parents showed the satisfaction of their children's achievements and mentioned that it was necessary for MOET to train some core local teachers for developing useful teaching methods in Vietnam. They hoped that it was gradually possible to close the perceived discrepancy between studying English with native teachers and Vietnamese teachers. More noticeably, it could help parents economise on learners' school fees and reduce inequality in primary schools in Vietnam.

Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

This research was conducted on a small group of pupils who had the same level of English proficiency and similar age. The results of the study are not a generalisation about the entire population of Vietnamese young learners. It is necessary to conduct further research on a large scale with different levels of English proficiency, ages and classroom contexts in Vietnam.

Reflections

My involvement in this qualitative research gave me a good opportunity to understand my teaching context and my pupils. What I found was that the use of textbook recordings could maximise learners' facility for native-like pronunciation and interactive listening (listening comprehension and ability to respond to spoken questions requiring short answers). Through this research, I also learned much about my teaching style and how to relate to my pupils. More importantly, I learned more about my pupils' characteristics and needs and what types of learning and teaching methods are appropriate for young learners.

Based on this study, it seems that lessons involving a

lot of repetition through different activities, for example listening and repeating spoken input, listening and answering mixed questions or listening and writing dialogues, have a beneficial effect on L2 acquisition by young learners. As Harmer (2007:56) maintained: 'the more students come across this language – the **more repeated** encounters they have with it – the **better** chance they have of remembering (and being able to use) it.' At the beginning of the teaching process, the quantity of language knowledge may not be as important as habit formation for young learners. It means that focusing instruction on attaining correct pronunciation, practising listening for comprehension and responding to spoken questions is very important in the initial stages. Once young learners can be fluent in producing what they have learned, their learning process can become autonomous. Young learners are very active in their learning process and the teacher does not need to push them at every stage.

The study helped me to better understand the discrepancy between native-speaker teachers and local teachers for English classrooms in Vietnam, but complete dependence on 'native-speakerism' underestimates local teacher abilities. As Harmer (2007:120) emphasised, non-native teachers' teaching knowledge was more important than their nationality or experience of English acquisition. I completely share Nunan's (2003:608) view that it is necessary to build long-term training programmes for improving local teachers' competence and professional skills. In addition, teachers need to be aware of the strong influence of age on the process of learning English. Therefore, selection of curricula, teaching methods and textbooks should take into consideration the age of young learners.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Young Learners

1. What grades have you been teaching? *(please choose and tick in the box)*
   - ☐ Grade 1
   - ☐ Grade 2
   - ☐ Grade 3
   - ☐ Grade 4
   - ☐ Grade 5

2. What age groups are your learners at? *(please choose and tick in the box)*
   - ☐ 6 to 7
   - ☐ 8 to 9
   - ☐ 9 to 10
   - ☐ Other ages

3. How many students are there in a classroom at primary schools on average?

4. How many students are there in your classroom?

5. At what age and grade level is English a compulsory subject for young learners?

6. How many hours / periods do young learners have to study English per week?

Textbooks and teaching aids

1. What textbooks are being used at your school? *(please specify the publisher)*

2. What skills are focused on in the textbooks? *(please choose and tick in the box)*
   - ☐ Reading
   - ☐ Speaking
   - ☐ Writing
   - ☐ Listening
   - ☐ Others (please specify)

3. Are there any teaching aids for English classes? *(please choose and tick in the box)*
   - ☐ CDs
   - ☐ VCR / DVD
   - ☐ Computer / laptop
   - ☐ Over Head Projector
   - ☐ TV
   - ☐ Others (please specify)

4. Apart from the textbooks, are there any supplement materials for your utility?
   - ☐ Flashcards
   - ☐ Text cards
   - ☐ Picture dictionary
   - ☐ Photocopy Master Book
   - ☐ Teacher's book
   - ☐ Others *(please specify)*

5. How often do you attend seminars or training workshops per year?
   - ☐ once or twice a year
   - ☐ three to five times a year
   - ☐ over five times
   - ☐ over ten times
   - ☐ monthly
   - ☐ Others

6. Do you usually use CDs in class? How many times do you give your students the CD to listen to per class? Why do you give students the opportunity to listen to CDs? What do you want them to obtain through listening to CDs?

Teaching techniques

1. What skills do you focus on to teach in the classroom? Why?

2. How do you teach pronunciation to young learners? *(Please specify in detail)*

3. How do you teach the speaking skill to young learners? *(Please specify in detail)*

4. How do you teach the listening skill to young learners? *(Please specify in detail)*

5. Do you usually use English in the classroom? When can you use English? When do you have to use Vietnamese?

6. How do you introduce vocabulary to young learners? *(Please specify in detail)*

7. Do you have to translate your English questions into Vietnamese for your learners?

8. Based on your assessment, with the above teaching methods, can students achieve interactive listening ability in reality? Can their pronunciation be accurate?

Appendix 2: Achievements

Teaching a course in assessment literacy to test takers: Its rationale, procedure, content and effectiveness

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Introduction

The importance of promulgating the knowledge, skills and theory about language assessment among related professionals has become increasingly important and recognised as such among the researchers in the field. Several researchers have already proclaimed its significance convincingly (e.g. Inbar-Lourie 2008, Malone 2008, Taylor 2009). Useful programmes have also been implemented in an attempt to enhance the knowledge of language assessment on the part of ESL teachers (Walters 2010). Meanwhile, a report has been released on the coverage of the knowledge elements in the courses in language assessment at higher education (Brown & Bailey 2008). One of the purposes of promoting assessment literacy is to avoid 'the potential misuse or abuse of tests' (Taylor 2009:25), and being literate in assessment means 'having the capacity to ask and answer critical questions about the purpose for assessment, about the fitness of the tool being used, about testing conditions, and about what is going to happen on the basis of the results' (Inbar-Lourie 2008:389).

Although much has been written about the importance of diffusion of assessment literacy, due attention does not seem to have been paid to test takers. The target audience of most articles seems to be those who are directly involved in test development, test administration and score use, such as classroom teachers, policy makers, staff in university admissions, language teachers and instructors, language test developers and researchers (Taylor 2009:22), despite the existence of a broader audience in the public domain (Taylor 2009:25).

The present paper argues for the need of sharing assessment literacy with test takers as well because they are the most important stakeholders and the greatest recipients of the benefits derived from the process and the product of language assessment. Based on this contention, a report will also be made on the course in assessment literacy that I taught to first-year university students in Japan.

The importance for test takers to be literate in assessment

In the field of language assessment, it is commonplace to claim that the primary purpose of language assessment is to make an inference about one's language ability. From this primary purpose a wide range of secondary purposes are derived, such as placement, diagnosis, selection and so forth (e.g. Bachman & Palmer 1996). However, it may be worth asking if test takers are able to make such a distinction between different purposes. For the test taker, perhaps, the most important purpose is to prepare for the test and to sit the test; thus, a testing activity itself can be a learning activity. Test takers prepare for the test, take the test and receive test scores and review their learning process. Throughout these processes, they learn to develop their language ability.

To help test takers make the most out of these learning processes, simply leaving everything up to the test taker would not be enough. Though surprisingly little research has been conducted to examine the learner's psychology in relation to assessment, the body of research into the impact of language assessment on the teacher, teaching and educational system to date indicates that an attempt to innovate in the assessment system and practice does not automatically lead to innovation in the educational system or practice in a corresponding manner (e.g. Alderson & Hamp-Lyons 1996, Cheng 2005, Green 2007, Wall 2005, Wall & Alderson 1995). Rather, the process of generating beneficial washback is mediated by various factors, such as the training background of teachers, their personal beliefs, the availability of educational resources, the culture of an institution, etc. (Watanabe 2004).

We are now only beginning to understand learners' psychology in relation to language assessment. It is assumed that a parallel relationship between assessment and teaching holds between assessment and learning. To make the best use of language assessment, learners must have at least some knowledge about language assessment. There are at least two reasons for teaching assessment literacy to test takers.

First, it is important for the test taker to overcome a psychological barrier and make the best use of assessment as a chance for learning. Fulcher (2010:278) correctly observes that 'washback remains an important and highly emotive subject', which is true not only of test developers, but also of test takers. In fact, it seems quite common that test takers experience a sense of fear towards the test they take. For example, Stiggins (2008) observes:

> Many of us grew up in classrooms in which our teachers believed that the way you maximise learning is by maximising anxiety. Assessment was always the great intimidator. Many of our teachers believe that if a little intimidation doesn't work, turn up the heat – try a lot of intimidation (Stiggins 2008:18).

Fullan (2007) reports on a similar observation relating to 'No Child Left Behind' legislation as follows:

> Fear, as in fear of dying, turns out not to be a powerful motivator beyond an initial immediate effect. Similarly, in the United States, fear of not meeting "adequate yearly progress" in No Child Left Behind legislation, with its increasingly punitive consequences, is not much of a motivator – perhaps a little, but only in the very short run (Fullan 2007:43).

If holding fear or anxiety towards the test is normal among test takers, helping them to be relieved from such a negative emotion becomes crucial. One way of helping test takers

to that end is to provide them with the knowledge about assessment or assessment literacy.

Second, it seems unlikely that test takers are motivated by assessment unless they are actively involved in the process. The role of assessment in enhancing learners' motivation has long been recognised among researchers in the field of educational evaluation (e.g. Lindquist 1950, Micheels & Karnes 1950). Recently its importance has been pointed out in relation to the research into washback effects of language testing (e.g. Alderson & Wall 1993, Watanabe 2002).

Among many theories of motivation with respect to second language learning, the attribution theory of motivation (e.g. Weiner 1992) is particularly relevant. Williams & Burden (1997) succinctly summarise the concept of locus of control, the core notion of this complex theory, as follows: 'One of the most significant factors in determining people's motivation to act in various ways and in retaining their interest and involvement is their sense of personal *control* over what is happening' (italics original, Williams & Burden 1997:101). Those learners who 'believe they can influence their own learning are more likely to succeed in school than those who believe their learning is controlled by other people' (Williams & Burden 1997:102), though it should be understood that the locus of control is not static but rather changeable.

Though not explicitly referring to the above theory, a number of reports appear to support its relevance to the issue of motivation to assessment. For example, it is observed that students trained to prepare for examinations by generating and then answering their own questions out-performed comparable groups who prepared in conventional ways (Foos, Mora & Tkacz 1994, King 1992). Likewise, students' involvement in the marking process has been found to have a positive effect on learning (Curtis & Woods 1929, Stiggins 2008). Black & Williams (2006a) conclude their research by stating that 'if they could be actively involved in the test process, students might see that they can be beneficiaries rather than victims of testing, because tests can help them improve their learning' (Black & Williams 2006a:16). Black & Williams (2006a) also state that the practice of encouraging students to review their work in the light of the goals and criteria helped them develop meta-cognitive approaches to learning (Black & Williams 2006a:17). It would not be surprising then if knowledge about language assessment were to help students get actively involved in the assessment process, which in turn would help them take it as a chance to learn the language.

In the rest of the present paper, I report on one attempt to teach assessment literacy to test takers, on the assumption that the practice will help them take full advantage from the process.

A course in teaching assessment literacy

Background

In the past decade, I have taught test literacy to various audiences, including students of upper-secondary-level education, university students of various majors, parents, researchers of non-education majors, and in-service language teachers in and outside Japan. The total audience amounted to approximately 2,000 people during the period from 2004 to 2010. Note that in this section the term 'test literacy' rather than 'assessment literacy' is used. This is the term that I used because it was assumed to be more familiar to the audience than the term assessment (Watanabe 2005).

Among various audiences, the present paper reports on the case of teaching test literacy to students at one of the state universities in Japan. The session was held in April 2005. A total of 113 first year students were enrolled in the course. All the students were majoring in education. At this point, they were not studying any specialised courses, because the courses for first year students include all basic subjects, such as English as a foreign language, information literacy, principles of life-long education, and so forth. The students were certainly interested in various issues in education, but it did not mean that all of them would be teachers after graduating from the university.

My session on test literacy was part of a required course offered for the first year students once a week during the spring term, running from 1 April through to the end of July. In each of the 15 sessions, the faculty members of the department took turns giving a lecture on their major field of study (e.g. materials design, the method of arranging classroom organisation patterns, etc.) Each session lasted 90 minutes. At the end of the term, the students were asked to choose the topic they were most interested in and submit a final essay on it. There were 18 students who chose my course as a topic for their coursework.

Purpose of the course

The purposes of the course were the following:

- to help students to understand the basic principles of language testing
- to help students overcome the fear of being tested and start taking a positive attitude towards language testing
- to help students become able to make informed and principled use of language tests and their outcomes.

Procedure

At the beginning of the course, I distributed blank sheets of paper and asked the students to write their general impressions about testing. The comments were analysed by one of the senior students who was writing her graduation thesis (Yashima 2006). The data analysis procedure she took was as follows: 1) Read the comments several times to familiarise yourself with the data (i.e. the students' statements), 2) assign a serial number to each statement for the purpose of future reference, 3) extract the main ideas of each statement and rewrite them in propositional forms, 4) identify common features among the items gathered in the previous step, 5) relate the items to the topic of language testing and 6) after going over these steps, classify the items into several categories. The results are reproduced in Table 1.

Note that each student wrote more than one comment, so in the table the total frequency count does not amount to 100%. Although the results of the in-depth analyses are not reported here, it can be seen that the comments were made

Table 1: Students' impressions about testing – before the course

Comments classified (N = 113)	%	N
Wishful thinking about ideal testing practice (e.g. the content that reflects what is taught in the class, students being allowed to give comments and opinions, students being given a chance to review after taking the test, etc.).	96%	108
Negative attitudes towards testing (e.g. troublesome, giving tremendous pressure, depressive, tough, want to run away from, etc.).	56%	63
Words associated with high-stakes testing (e.g. grades, entrance exams, promotion, future, etc.).	33%	38
Views of a test as a negative motivator (e.g. failure, driving me to work harder, etc.).	33%	37
Study methods with respect to testing (e.g. rote-memorisation, overnight cramming, etc.).	20%	23
Speculation about teachers' attitudes (e.g. likely to evaluate students only on the basis of test scores).	20%	24
A list of the tests they had taken before with their own comments (e.g. in-class tests, term-end tests, the TOEFL, IELTS, TOEIC, etc.).	19%	21

Table 2: Students' comments about the announcement of being tested on the film

Before the announcement of the 'test'	After the announcement of the 'test'
I was being relaxed, enjoying watching the film.	I got nervous, beginning to pay attention to details.
I was relaxing myself.	I began listening to the language the characters were using carefully.
I was wondering what the teacher would ask us to do.	I was relaxed because people around me got quiet at the announcement.
I was enjoying the film with classmates around me.	I began to predict what would be tested.
I was enjoying watching and listening to the film.	I began paying attention to Japanese subtitles.
I was enjoying watching the film.	I began trying to memorise the storyline.

in very general terms, and were mostly negative. Later in this paper, these comments will be compared with those which were collected at the end of the course.

The session started by showing a film, in order to get students' attention and to help the students notice the effect of testing on their attitudes. The following procedure was taken. First, I played a Japanese animated film in a dubbed version of English with Japanese subtitles. In several minutes, when I noticed the film caught the attention of all the students, I stopped it and told them that they would be tested about the film, even though, in reality, I would not be testing anything. I played the film again for another several minutes. I stopped it and asked them to write self-reflective comments on how their attitudes changed before and after the announcement about testing. Typical self-observations reported are summarised in Table 2.

I explained to the students the purpose of the course, and that one of the purposes would be to help them overcome the type of test anxiety they might have just experienced.

Content

The course started by stating basic functions of language assessment and associated notions in non-specialist words, with the purpose of helping the students overcome the psychological barrier that generates negative attitudes towards testing. They are listed and discussed below:

1. Not all tests are threatening

To convince the students that tests are not necessarily threatening to their identity, a range of psychological, occupational and language tests were introduced. The sample test items included the Rorschach inkblot test (Rorschach 1942), the Baum test (Koch 1949), *Cambridge English: Young Learners* (aka *Young Learners English* or *YLE*), and other tests which all would appear friendly to test takers.

2. Tests are an important means of communication

The purpose of this section was to help the students understand that the test is not a 'big brother' controlling their behaviour, but rather a means of communication which is used to understand their ability which would otherwise remain hidden. The students were invited to be involved in an interactive psychological test, the Johari Window (Luft 1969), in pairs, to understand the hidden aspects of each other's personality by describing them by referring to a set of 56 adjectives. See Luft (1969) for details of this device.

3. Testing can take many forms

It was assumed that there were many students who were only familiar with the traditional type of paper-and-pencil test they had sat at school. It was also assumed that most of the students would tend to take the result of a 'one-shot-examination' too seriously, as if it showed their entire ability or even their whole personality. This made it crucial to introduce a wider variety of assessment methods to them, including so-called alternative assessments, such as self-assessment, role-play, portfolio, etc. By so doing, an attempt was made to help them understand the importance of investigating their ability from multiple perspectives.

4. Different test tasks tap into different aspects of language ability

One of the central tenets of teaching test literacy is that students should take a flexible view about language testing. They need to understand that different tasks help elicit different aspects of the same ability. I started this section by showing them a sample of ambiguous figures which appear differently in different contexts (e.g. the figure which is recognised as 13 when it is placed between 12 and 14, but appears as B if it is placed between A and C). I also showed various forms of item types (e.g. cloze, short-answer, multiple-choice, true-false) constructed on the same passage

in different modalities (e.g. reading and listening). I asked them to answer the questions, so they might understand that even the same text could be made difficult or easy depending upon the types of questions. This highlighted the need to seek multiple opportunities to obtain the true quality of their language ability.

5. New approaches to understanding language ability and language use

Many students seemed to be familiar with only the traditional types of paper-and-pencil tests typically in the form of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. This is why, in this section, I introduced frames of reference for understanding language ability (e.g. Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines) and test tasks (from exams such as *Teaching Knowledge Test* (TKT) and *Cambridge English: Young Learners (YLE)* tests) which were assumedly unfamiliar to the students. The very basic notion of Item Response Theory (IRT) was also introduced by using down-to-earth non-technical language. I also emphasised the importance of self-assessment and introduced various instruments helpful to that end (e.g. DIALANG).

6. Basic principles of language testing

The students were first invited to give thought to the reason why a test is necessary. They were then led to the idea that any test is based on a principle. Based on the understanding of basic principles, the key notions of language testing including validity, reliability and practicality were introduced by using non-technical language (e.g. 'relevance' for validity, 'consistency' for reliability, 'real-life constraint' for practicality).

7. The most important function of language testing

Most students must have been busy preparing for the test, thus never paused to ponder what the test is for. It was deemed important for them to learn that the most important function of language testing is to make a language ability visible which would otherwise remain invisible. Several examples were provided to illustrate that there are many 'things' that cannot be seen but need to be seen. For example 'love' exists but cannot be seen so should be made visible in the form of a present, for example. The students were encouraged to view taking a test as a chance to exhibit their own ability. This topic was treated to help students raise their awareness of the most basic level of principle of language assessment: that is, 'why' there is such a thing called a test.

8. Psychological principles of language testing

To be continued from the previous section, an attempt was made to help students understand that all tests are based on a specific principle rather than being constructed and administered haphazardly. An example was taken from the Gestalt principle of closure in relation to the cloze test. First, the students were informed that we tend to see complete figures even when part of the information is not present. They were provided with many examples that showed that if they had knowledge, they would be able to fill in the missing part from the whole. The example included the Wug test (Berko 1958), which is used to test the language knowledge

of children (i.e. 'There is a wug.' 'Now there are two . . .'). They were then asked to tackle a sample cloze test.

9. Qualities of good testing practice

I started this section by introducing the notion of validity by referring to the measurement instruments which were familiar to all the students (e.g. to measure humidity, a hygrometer is used, rather than a thermometer, because the former is relevant to the purpose but not the latter, etc.). Afterwards, I presented a test item as an example from the first-stage national university entrance examination, which was also deemed familiar to all the students. I asked students to discuss the congruence of the item type to its purpose. The elements threatening validity were then mentioned, e.g. invalid application of tests, inappropriate selection of content, poor criterion selection and use of invalid constructs (Henning 1987). The greatest emphasis was placed on teaching students about the importance of taking the test which is relevant to the purpose, if such an option is available.

The students were then taught that no measurements are perfectly accurate, and the notion of standard error of measurement (SEM), the standard deviation of errors or measurement that are associated with test scores from a certain group of test takers, was introduced. It was noted that they should not take the score derived from only one test as the absolute indicator of their own ability. Like the explanation about validity, that of reliability was followed by notes on threats to reliability (e.g. variance attributable to examinees, such as health, fatigue, physical characteristics, motivation, emotion, memory, concentration, forgetfulness, impulsiveness, carelessness, comprehension of directions, etc.).

The notion of practicality was treated as a constraint on the administration of testing, which led to the idea that it is not possible for any test to measure one's entire ability with perfect accuracy.

10. Assessing language in practice

Finally, students were invited to calculate inter-rater reliability by using the Spearman's rank-order correlation. They were shown 10 English essays by Japanese high school students, and asked to give scores of 1 (the poorest) to 20 (the best). A spreadsheet had been prepared, so all students had to do was fill in the chart and produce reliability coefficients manually. The purpose was to give the students the opportunity to get involved in checking their own reliability as a rater and understand the rating can be subjective, though it is important to aim at objectivity. The section concluded by showing them various rating rubrics.

The effectiveness of the course

At the end of the course, I asked the participants to write everything they had learned from the course. Their comments are summarised in Table 3.

By comparing the comments in this table with those in Table 1, it is obvious that changes took place in the students' views about testing in general and language testing in particular. Firstly, prior to the course, they would use nebulous words (e.g. wishful thinking such as 'I wish there

Table 3: Students' impressions about testing – after the course

Comments classified (N = 113)	%	N
The three qualities of good assessment practice (i.e. validity, reliability and practicality).	64%	72
The importance of checking reliability.	37%	33
Importance of criteria to assess performance objectively.	27%	31
Comments on various tests they had taken before (e.g. reliability of in-class tests, TOEFL and test-taking conditions, etc.) using the terms that they learned in the course.	25%	27
The difficulty of marking students' essays.	25%	28
Comments on testing from teachers' perspectives (e.g. 'my teacher must have worked hard to produce a good test when I was a student,' etc.).	12%	14
The fact that there are tests of 'good' quality and 'poor' quality.	12%	15

were no such thing as testing . . .'), but after the course the students gave comments by using specific terms (e.g. reliability) referring to specific tests (e.g. TOEFL). Secondly, the students had given comments from students' points of view before the session, whereas after the session they gave comments from teachers' or test-administrators' points of view. Finally, and most importantly, their pre-course comments showed negative views about testing, but post-course comments became neutral, if not totally positive.

Conclusions, limitations and future directions

The present paper argues for the importance of teaching assessment literacy to test takers and reports on the procedure and outcome of a course conducted with a group of university students in Japan. The purpose of the course was to help students become familiar with general principles of language assessment. By so doing, it was expected that they would become able to take an active role in the entire process of language testing activity. Despite its ambition, however, the present report is admittedly sketchy and the outcome too premature to generalise to other contexts. To make it a more productive endeavour, a number of issues need to be explored. Firstly, it is yet to be established if the content and the procedure are relevant to the purpose of teaching assessment literacy. There might be more important issues to be covered in a more effective way. Secondly, though changes seem to have taken place in the subjective views about language testing as a result of the course, it is yet to be examined if there would be any change in their actual behaviours with respect to the process of being involved in the language assessment practice.

The present paper admittedly has many limitations. For example, the paper focuses on the students following a course of study at the Department of Education, which might be the reason why the course turned out to be a positive experience for them. Different reactions could be anticipated from different groups of participants. The age of the target audience is yet another issue to be considered in future research and practice. The present paper reported on the case of university students to illustrate a course in assessment literacy. However, as has been mentioned at the beginning of the paper, the courses that I taught in the past included a wider variety of audience. Importantly,

assessment literacy in young learners also needs more discussion and investigation. Given that young children are 'not as fully aware of their own thinking and learning processes as are adolescents and adults' (Rubin, Chamot, Harris & Anderson 2007:149), it should be determined how old students should be to receive instruction in assessment literacy. A large amount of data sets gathered from the courses I have conducted are still to be analysed, and they are expected to yield further insight.

Despite these limitations, it could be suggested that, in the future, the component of assessment literacy may usefully be incorporated in a learning training programme. Research into language learning strategies emphasises the importance of metacognitive skills (e.g. Anderson 2008, Graham 1997, Murphy 2008, O'Malley & Chamot 1990, Oxford 1990), and it is common to stress the importance of monitoring as one important component comprising the system of learning strategies (e.g. Macaro 2001, McDonough 1995). The following observation is suggestive: 'If, for example, the teaching develops metacognitive skills in the students, they can then regulate their own learning to a greater extent and thus become less dependent on feedback from others' (Black & Williams 2006b:89). Recently, these notions have been elaborated into one of self-regulation (Oxford 2011). All these trends seem to provide useful insights to the idea of teaching assessment literacy.

The importance of promoting assessment literacy among groups of test developers, teachers and other people of related professions is undoubtedly important. However, specific details do not seem to have been determined yet as to what sort of knowledge needs to be taught at what level of depth and other specifics. Once they have been clarified, the effectiveness needs to be investigated to render the programme workable. It is hoped that the present report makes a contribution, albeit small, to the issue.

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ALTE briefing

ALTE 4th International Conference

Many leading voices in language assessment from around the world were among almost 400 delegates who attended the ALTE 4th International Conference in Kraków, Poland in early July 2011. The conference was hosted by the Jagiellonian University and delegates were able to discuss a wide range of topics related to the theme of the conference: *The Impact of Language Frameworks on Assessment, Learning and Teaching, viewed from the perspectives of policies, procedures and challenges*.

Guest speaker, Pierre Mairesse, Director for *Lifelong Learning: Horizontal Issues and 2020 Strategy* at the European Commission, attended on behalf of the European Commission and underlined the importance of the work of ALTE in Europe. There were also key contributions from Dr Emyr Davies, Chair of the ALTE Executive Committee, and Professor Karol Musiol, President of the Jagiellonian University.

In his plenary presentation, Professor Lyle F Bachman (the University of California) considered how different language frameworks impact on language assessment practice. Other plenary presentations were given by Professor Giuliana Grego Bolli (the Università per Stranieri di Perugia), Dr Neil Jones (Cambridge ESOL), Dr Waldemar Martyniuk (the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz), Professor Elana Shohamy (Tel-Aviv University) and Dr Michaela Perlmann-Balme (Goethe-Institut). In addition to the plenary presentations, the three-day conference included over 100 parallel presentations covering a diverse range of issues, languages and testing contexts.

The conference also provided a platform for the Language Assessment for Migration and Integration (LAMI) forum. Their lively debate looked at the ethical and practical issues associated with using language tests for immigration, with a particular focus on language testing and access, and included case studies of the current situation regarding language testing and access in Belgium, Italy and the UK.

Prior to the conference, Dr Ardeshir Geranpayeh, Head of Psychometrics and Data Services in the Research and Validation Group at Cambridge ESOL, ran a two-day course on *The Application of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) in Language Testing Research*.

Summer testing courses

Participants from Chile, Iran, Japan, Thailand and several European countries attended ALTE's week-long summer testing courses in Copenhagen, Denmark in September. The first week's course was an *Introductory Course in Language Testing* run by Professor Cyril Weir (University of Bedfordshire) and Dr Lynda Taylor (Consultant to University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations). The course focused on the practical application of testing and assessment theory. The second week's course was an *Introductory Course in Language Testing Research Methodology*. It was run by Dr Hanan Khalifa, Head of Research and Publications in the Research and Validation Group at Cambridge ESOL, and Dr Jayanti Banerjee (Cambridge-Michigan Language Assessments, University of Michigan). It covered a wide range of topics, such as research design, classroom research, action research, data collection methods, approaches to data analysis, reporting and research quality assurance.

ALTE's 40th meeting and conference

ALTE's 40th meeting and conference will take place in Bochum, Germany, from 16–18 November, and will be hosted by one of ALTE's German members, TestDaF. The first two days will include a number of Special Interest Group meetings, and workshops for ALTE members and affiliates, and the third day will be an open conference day for anyone with an interest in language testing. The theme of the conference is *Achieving Context Validity*, and the speakers at the conference will include Professor Gillian Wigglesworth, Professor Cyril Weir, Professor Günther Sigott and Dr Evelina Galaczi.

Following the conference, ALTE will run a two-day *Introduction to Assessing Speaking Course* and a one-day *Foundation Course: Getting Started*. Dr Evelina Galaczi and Lucy Chambers from the Research and Validation Group at Cambridge ESOL will run the Speaking Course, and Annie Broadhead, Consultant to Cambridge ESOL, will run the Foundation Course.

For information about ALTE's activities, please visit the ALTE website – www.alte.org To become an Individual Affiliate of ALTE, please download an application form from the ALTE website or contact the Secretariat (info@alte.org). This is free of charge and means you will receive advance information on ALTE events and activities, and an invitation to join the ALTE electronic discussion fora.

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ALTE Association of Language Testers in Europe

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